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NOTES

Little, Brown is publishing **LILLIAN HELLMAN's An Unfinished Woman**. . . . Two **EDWARD GOREY** books are coming out this year: **The Blue Aspic** (Meredith) and **The Iron Tonic** (Albanocani). . . . **NORMAN BIRNBAUM** is teaching at Amherst. Oxford is bringing out his **Crisis of Industrial Society** this summer. . . . A former U.S. Army Doctor in Vietnam, **HERBERT KROHN** has lived in Hong Kong and traveled in Asia. Mr. Krohn is now living in New York. . . . Atheneum has just brought out **JOHN HOLLANDER's Types of Shape**. . . . **LESLIE EPSTEIN** lives in New York and teaches at Queens. . . . **DAVID BRONSEN** teaches German at Washington University in St. Louis. He spent this year in Austria. . . . **PETER DAVISON's** third collection of verse, **Pretending to be Asleep**, will be published this autumn. . . . **GEOFFREY CANNON** is to be Editor of **Radio Times** ("the BBC equivalent of **TV Guide**," he tells us). Mr. Cannon writes a weekly rock column for **The Guardian**. . . . A Fellow of Kings College, **TONY TANNER** is finishing a book on Contemporary American Fiction, which will be called **The City of Lex**. Mr. Tanner will be at Stanford this summer. . . . **JAMES BURKHART GILBERT** teaches History at Maryland. . . . **ROBERT BOYERS** is Editor of **Salmagundi**. . . . **G. S. ROUSSEAU** is writing a book on literature and science. Mr. Rousseau teaches at UCLA.

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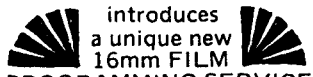

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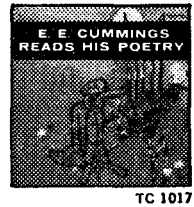

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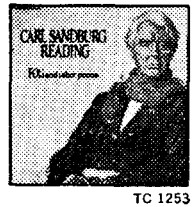

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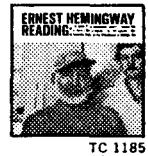

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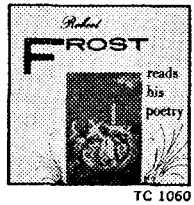

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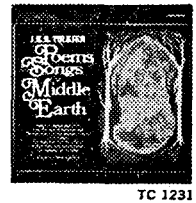

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Lillian Hellman

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This chapter from An Unfinished Woman, *a book of memoirs by Lillian Hellman, comes in the middle of an account of her six months visit to the Soviet Union during the war.* "The Russians invited me on a cultural mission in 1944 and Washington, acting with faceless discretion, wanted me to go." *There are later chapters in the book about the Soviet Union, when she saw it again, twenty-two years later.*

From a diary, Moscow, 1944:

The Kremlin is the political heart of the Soviet Union and the geographical heart of Moscow. The city grew up around the great thirteenth-century walls that enclose the buildings of the Kremlin and has continued to grow away from them into what is called the A Circle and the outer B Circle. The A Circle includes the Kremlin, the important government buildings, the main shopping district, many of the theaters and the big hotels. The National Hotel faces St. Basil's Cathedral and the main gate of the north Kremlin wall. Between the cathedral and the wall is that famous cobblestone passage which has seen so much of Russian history: in the seventeenth century a czarist massacre of friendly petitioners; in the nineteenth century it was here that Napoleon turned loose his cannons on the burning city; in 1917 the Bolsheviks and the White Guards fought until the cobblestones were slippery with frozen blood, the passage blocked by bodies.

I am told that to the pure in art, St. Basil's is one of the architectural freaks of the world: to me it has the daring self-assurance

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of a great work. It is true that within one lifetime it would not be possible to see all that is of it or all that is on it. It is not a large church, but it has no lonely half inch. Maybe the architect–churchmen omitted the sculptured eye of a toad or a mandrake root, but you cannot be sure that if you looked again they wouldn't turn up. The cathedral rises to violate all rules, and maybe it reflects the nature of the people who move past it today as truly as it reflected the sixteenth-century men who built it for Ivan the Terrible.

The Germans never came closer to Moscow than the airport, which, of course, was close enough, but the city was spared the horrors of Stalingrad and Leningrad. But now, December, 1944, the people here look tired, cold, shabby and exhausted-sick in this, the easiest,[1] winter of the war.

Russians are so accustomed to cold that they seldom speak about it, but when they describe the first winter of the war they speak about it even before they tell you of the evacuation of women, children and Jews, the resettlement in the Urals when families were lost to each other for months, the strange diets in places forced to feed refugees — a friend of mine, her mother and child ate nothing but cavíar and milk for seven weeks — the arrival of the Siberian army that is credited with saving Moscow, and the young student army that fought the Germans at and near the airport. The students had been in classes the day before, they had no training, many of them had no guns, there was no air cover, no large artillery. They were volunteers and most of them were killed in the first week. When they tell you about the students somebody, maybe two people, start to cry, and the others are silent. Almost everybody by this year of 1944 has lost a husband, a father, a son, and usually more than one man in a family has been killed. But it is for the students that they cry or start to cough until the crying stops. I think they cry, in part, for their own endurance during these last awful three and a half years, in pride for that endurance.

Russians have always had a deep love of their country, but now

1 This was the word used in 1944. In 1966, three Muscovites told me it had been the hardest winter of the war. I think this conflict of memory came about because in 1944 they knew they were on the way to victory and an end. In 1966 they remember only the deprivation and the misery.

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they are in love with each other. They do not say they like bread: they say, "All Russian people like bread," as if liking bread was a medal won in a school of high morals. They no longer say, "Pushkin wrote . . ." but "Pushkin, one of the greatest poets who ever lived" — and a few days ago, a woman said to me, "We have no bald men in Russia." It's a kind of national coming-of-war-age pride. They don't boast about the Red Army or the near starving civil population, but they hurry to tell you about the millions of books sold last year, the forty theaters that are filled at every performance, the people who wait in line through the freezing nights to buy tickets for a ballet or a concert. The Russian intellectual has had a hard life. If he is now in his late thirties, forties or fifties he has gone through the revolution and the hunger, privations and upheavals that followed the revolution. The thirties were the first promise of something better, but the promise was soon followed by the hurricane of the 1937–1938 purges that sent him whirling, looking for the protective walls that were not there. The accusations against his friends or his heroes were only half understood and were, therefore, more frightening. Such men and women tell you that one day they knew a criminal charge of treason or disloyalty could not be true, the next day felt uncertain, and within a short time were half convinced that perhaps their country, their revolution might have been betrayed. Great honor must and will be paid those who did protest the criminal purges. It is hard to judge those who tossed about in silent doubt and despair, but it is even harder to believe that they did not understand what was happening.

Those years of struggle from the dark centuries of ignorance and poverty, then famine, then hope, then nightmare ideological upheavals, and, finally, war on a scale that has never been seen before, have made deep marks on all of them. The least important scar, perhaps, is a chip-on-the-shoulder feeling toward foreigners that often takes the form of looking for the insult. Last week a woman I like came to see me. She is in her forties, a pleasant lady who translates French and English poetry. Her face was tense and twitchy. She began almost in the middle of a sentence, "Last night he said across the table, 'Where is Akhmatova? Gone, gone with so many others.' What do you think of that," she asked me, *"What do you think of that?"*

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I said, "Is it so terrible? You told me only last week about the trouble Akhmatova has had —"

She ran toward me, pulling up her sweater as she came. "There are scars here," she shouted, "although they were not made with a knife. All over me, all over all of us. But I don't show them to strangers, I don't sip cognac at tables and lift my clothes to show the long scar called Akhmatova, my friend Akhmatova, or the scar called Mandelstam — You will not hurt my scars. But *he* wanted to put his fingers in them so they would bleed again."

Russians puzzle us, we puzzle them. Their pride is the pride of poor people, the manners they require from others must be more elegant than ever could have been known at Versailles. And in so many ways their recent social customs have run counter to ours: they are, for example, romantic and dawn-fogged about sex, and I often find the talk about love and fidelity too highminded for my history or my taste.

But it is easier for me than for most foreigners. Two plays, *The Little Foxes* and *Watch on the Rhine,* are in rehearsal. (Rehearsals have been going on for six months.) Certainly there are other foreigners who have good relations with Russians, but most of the journalists, diplomats, military and trade commissions live on islands of each other, cut off from all Russians except waiters, cooks, translators and various forms of bribe-takers such as whores and telephone operators.

The largest of these islands is the Metropole Hotel, teasing close to the walls of the Kremlin. It was built in the nineteenth century, and while it is often referred to as run-down elegant, it could never have been more than large and ostentatious with the carved gewgaws and marble that the Russian rich liked so much. (It was in the Metropole that the last holdout aristocracy of Moscow barricaded itself during the revolution, but that story has too many versions to believe any of them.) Now the hotel is in a state of disrepair and smells of cabbage, but its vast corridors burst with the kind of international high jinks that should attract a magazine novelist, except that the high jinks are not very high and always have an aimless, frivol-out quality.

Most of the foreign journalists live at the Metropole and they have a long list of understandable grievances: the press censors are

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suspicious, irrational, arbitrary; they have never been allowed to visit the front lines, seldom been allowed to travel anywhere; they see few important government people and must get information out of Russian newspapers or on the rumor circuit; there is nothing to buy with money they would like to spend; Moscow winter weather is terrible and darkness comes depressingly early in the afternoon and moves into lonely nights.

Journalists cannot, therefore, do a proper job and it is a bad life for them, but with the exception of Alexander Werth, John Hersey and a few others, they are men used to bullying their way around the world and their daily defeats turn dinner into a sour stew of complaints unless one turns off the ears and plays the game of who is that at the next table or across the room.

Who is that, on a recent evening, was a trade commission from Iceland; two unidentified men from Mongolia; a repatriated Russian tenor and his family who had been living in Shanghai; an American who is here to sell farm machinery and who plays the piano very well; part of the English military mission whose chief had been a spy in the First World War and author of a famous book about his experiences as a foreign agent — but who considers it unjust, or pretends to, that the Russians think he is possibly still spying; and four young, and one not so young, whores, accompanied by a very small Russian man. We were joined at dinner that night by a magazine writer who had arrived only a week before and had just been through his first rough days of Russian press censor officials. When he had had enough to drink he talked very loud about all Russians being savages, and when I had had enough to drink I said I didn't think so, and he said he did, and I said what difference did that make, and he said something else, and I said lots of people who had just learned not to sleep in their underwear thought that other people were savages, and it was all high-class talk like that until the American farm-machine gentleman got up to drown us with the piano.

I can't seem to stay away from the Metropole: it is a highly colored small station in the somber world of the embassy where I live, and a relief from the painful world of my Russian friends. It's a grubby joint but it's lively and I have taken to dropping over al-

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most every day to listen to the stories about the night before, or the ones that Alex Werth remembers from the first year of the war, or Henry Shapiro remembers from even further back. Then I wander up and down the corridors, looking for people to talk to.

The third floor is the most interesting: two Turkish diplomats who never seem to be at home have the rooms opposite the elevator; across the hall from them are two Japanese military attachés and, in an adjoining cubicle, their Japanese chauffeur. Next to him is a journalist of a neutral country who is very proud that his mistress was once the mistress to a group of Uzbeks. This lady laughs too loud and too much and is the reason why the repatriated Russian tenor, who lives next door with his family, spends his mornings demanding a new suite of rooms. Next to the Russian tenor is a recently arrived middle-aged American who works in our consulate. He is disturbed by the almost nightly arrival of a big Russian girl who pushes into his room, looks around and screams. The American knows no Russian, the big girl no English, and nobody will tell him that the girl is called Dempsey because she once, when hitting a man, reminded somebody of Jack Dempsey. Now she mourns the former occupant of the room who left Moscow without telling her and she thinks the middle-aged American had something to do with her lover's disappearance.

Across the hall lives a lady called Miss Butter Fingers, radical in the politics of her own country and most sympathetic to the Soviet Union, except on the day, long before my arrival, when she stole an icon on a visit to a German-destroyed monastery near Moscow. Her journalist colleagues were disturbed and forced her to return the loot with the threat of a kangaroo trial in the lobby of the hotel. Since then she does not often appear in the dining room.

Yesterday the Russian tenor spoke to me. Shanghai had taught him a little English, I knew a little French, but I did not know until the end of our half hour that he greeted me so warmly because he thought I was Australian and had been sent by the British Embassy to help him arrange a larger and quieter hotel apartment with what he called *un piano propre*. I have no idea why he thought the British would be willing to tangle with anything like that, but by the time I got around to asking, the tenor had given me up as an imposter. In any case, he loves his homeland with all his heart, he

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wishes to sing once again for his peoples but how practice without *un piano propre* and with four children? I tried, occasionally, to speak, to ask why and how he had come back to Moscow, but his handsome wife appeared about that time and he introduced her, adding the information that she was his first wife and his fourth wife and his cousin.

Down the hall from the tenor, in two apartments, live the fur buyers. The fur buyers are three men of no age except vague middle age, interchangeable in color and size. They interested me more than anybody in the hotel and so I tried to do a little research on them. But any research was limited because they have been in the hotel so much longer than anybody else that nobody is sure of anything about them except "the trouble."

The fur buyers are American by citizenship. This was established by the embassy, and so Mr. Harriman invited them, along with all other Americans in Moscow, to a Christmas party. I did my best to speak with them, to bring them food and drink, even to ask one of them if he would dance with me. We did dance for a few minutes, but I got nothing more than nods and what I guess were smiles, and my attempts at conversation produced little except an occasional half-recognizable sound in English, and other sounds in a language I could not identify. (Russians say the fur buyers speak very little Russian, but seem to understand the language.)

Some of their hotel-mates claim they are Latvians, others insist they are Bessarabians, but the information at our consulate is that they were employed by United States merchants as experts on the raw fur pelts that were, before the war, sold at giant auctions. Evidently, they used to spend six or eight months a year traveling around the Soviet Union and were caught in Moscow by the outbreak of the war. But none of this explains why they are still here: they are American citizens and they could have gone home long ago. When I asked Alex Werth about this he said, "Where's home for them?" I guess that's the answer, although another man I know feels that they wish to stay here in the belief that the war will end any minute and they will be the first on the scene to bid for the valuable wild minks and chinchillas who, unlike the hunters, must have grown fatter and more beautiful during the war.

"The trouble" involved the transshipment of a Russian prosti-

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tute. (Each fur buyer has a girl, but they are men who believe in class distinctions, because the girls never appear at their dining room table and nobody has ever seen them with the girls in the lobby or in the corridors.) I first heard of "the trouble" from a British Third Secretary, but the very mention of it caused him to choke with giggles and I could make little sense of what he was saying. Last week I went to a large official Russian party and spent most of the evening talking to Maxim Litvinov who had recently returned to Moscow. [1968 — I knew Litvinov first when he was Ambassador to Washington and liked and admired him. Mrs. Litvinov had been the very British Ivy Low. I found Ivy — a combination of Bloomsbury and Russian Revolution — charming, but Hammett didn't. She had come for a weekend visit to the Pleasantville farm. On the second night Dash didn't appear for dinner. I went upstairs to find him reading on his bed. He shook his head. I nodded mine. He shook his and I knew that no amount of arguing would bring him to dinner. Angrily I said, "Why?" He said, "Because she's the biggest waste of time since the parcheesi board."] Litvinov and I sat at a table watching the dancers, who were mostly diplomats. Maxim doesn't think well of diplomats and spoke of them as buyers and sellers of world herring. One passing dancer was, he said, "the highest–ranking pederast" in Moscow, and when another gentleman, too tall and too handsome, went by Litvinov laughed and said, "It was the custom in his time to choose for foreign service on the basis of length of body and bone in nose, as with butlers. You can imagine their surprise when they first saw small, fat me." Then he raised his finger, pointed to a young, very blond man and said sharply, "That one tries too many tricks. We think he managed the girl in the trunk for the fur buyer. But why did he do it?" Before I could ask about the girl in the trunk, Litvinov was called to the phone and did not appear again that night.

The next day I pinned down the British Third Secretary who had had the giggles. There had been a long box in the lobby of the Metropole marked, in Russian, COFFIN OF A CHILD FOR TRANSSHIPMENT. The box carried whatever are the proper papers for a coffin and a Stockholm receiving address. It got through the Leningrad customs until a train official got curious about some odd-looking holes in the box. He poked into them with some kind of poking

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instrument that went, unexpectedly, through to another series of holes. Strange sounds began to be heard, and when the coffin was broken open there was a trunk inside the coffin and a Russian girl in whatever form of hysteria you get from being in a trunk that is in a coffin. The investigation turned up the news that the trunk belonged to one of the fur buyers and so did the girl. The girl was released, returned to Moscow, and no further action was taken. That seemed odd because the Russians are very severe about exit visas, but when I asked my British friend why, he shrugged and said, "Maybe they are giving everybody enough rope. They don't like the embassy Swedes, but they can't seem to get anything on them."

"But what about the fur buyer who shipped her?"

He said, "I don't know. He says he didn't ship her. He says she stole his trunk and made her own coffin."

Last month came the good news of our naval victory in the Philippines. But on the third floor of the Metropole the news got mixed up: the Japanese radio announced it as a victory for *their* navy and so the Japanese military attachés decided to celebrate with a refined, small party, where, according to the Russian tenor, tidbits were served, classical music came from the phonograph and the guests were in their own beds quite early. But the Japanese chauffeur, in his cubicle, only got going about three in the morning with the noise of crashing glass and muffled female sounds. A half hour was not enough to worry his corridor mates of the Metropole, but when the female sounds became screams of fear, a few of the more humane rose from their beds. Sleepy, annoyed figures gathered in the hall. Out came the Turks, out the Mongols, out the ex-mistress of the Uzbeks, out the tenor and his children, out, even, the fur buyers to the edge of the gathering. Although the screams were now steady and agonized, the observers seemed reluctant to move. A reason was found that had not before occurred in the tolerant international life of the hotel: nobody wanted to mix himself into the affairs of a country at war with the United States, particularly since it had now been firmly established that it was our naval victory and not the Japanese. But a solution was finally reached: one of the Turks — a neutral — would not go directly to the chauffeur's room, but agreed to knock at the door of the strangely absent Japanese

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attachés and bring the screams to their attention. This was done, and the Japanese attachés, evidently awake and prepared for the summons, padded down the hall in Bond Street dressing gowns carrying a long pole used for opening windows and several smaller implements. They broke open the door. On the floor, in a corner, were two crouching women, one of whom had her leg stretched at an odd angle. (It was later found that she had a broken foot. She told the police that she had fallen over her girl friend during a game of tipsy hide and seek.) Several windows were smashed, all mirrors were broken and an overstuffed chair was slashed to pieces. At this moment, the hotel manager pushed his way through the crowd, entered the room, held up his hand for silence and said in English, "I wish to say that this is simply not nice."

There are, of course, many quiet days at the Metropole. Last week very little happened. A journalist returning from London brought a girl he knew three pairs of nylon stockings. She thought them a mingy, unloving gift, so she wrote a short account of their life together and sent one copy to his newspaper and a carbon to his wife. A code clerk in a minor embassy slapped the oldest child of the Russian tenor and the Russian tenor says that he regrets his return from Shanghai into the company of barbarians. One of the fur buyers received a box of eggs that exploded in the main lobby with such force that the manager had him frisked for a gun.

The night the child got slapped John Hersey and I went to the opera. The streets around the Bolshoi were as crowded as they always are on the night of any performance. The Tchaikovsky–Pushkin *Pique Dame* was being performed. The cold, tired, hungry audience seems to feel at home with the lush ninteenth-century aristocrats on the stage. Maybe they would enjoy the comedy dramas in the Metropole across the street.

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Richard Poirier

A LITERATURE OF LAW AND ORDER

Given the now monumental amount of interpretation lavished on the academically entrenched works of modern literature, it has largely escaped notice that most of these works are self-analytical to a degree that might have warned against further efforts in the same direction. When it comes to explication, the major works in English since about the middle of the last century are almost always easier to manage, for the assiduous seeker after patterns and myths and meanings, than are works written before then: Conrad offers more handles than Fielding, not to mention Jane Austen, and Yeats protrudes such a profusion of levers and locks and keys as to induce a clanky bustle from critics who would be paralyzed before the "Lucy" poems of Wordsworth. Few modern writers have been guided, that is, by Marianne Moore's nice response to a young man who asked her to be more explicit. "One can only be as explicit," she remarked, "as one's natural reticence allows one to be." This quality of reticence — of letting works proceed without such guidelines as those supplied *Ulysses* by Joyce, without set passages, explanatory notes, loudly posted metaphorical or mythic patterns, organizational gimmicks and allusive nomenclature — this kind of reticence began to disappear even before this century in American literature with Hawthorne and Melville.

What does it mean when novelists and poets exercise within their works the talents which their readers and interpreters are normally expected to bring to them? Most simply, I suppose it means that the novelist or poet has discovered that there is no such thing any more (if indeed there ever was) as raw material for art. All

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material includes the interpretations that will be made of it. And the writer who discovers this about his material simultaneously discovers it about himself and about other selves who aspire to any originality of expression. What does it mean when the self in literature gets to be little more than one expression, and not necessarily the most compelling one, of those literary modes, conventions and mythologies that were ideally intended only as a convenience to the self in its attempts at expression? "Here I am Antony; Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave . . ." — Shakespeare had the good literary fortune of not having to imagine that the knave would have any self-projecting answer: "I know just how you feel, Antony." No one bothers Shakespeare, as they always bother novelists, with questions about the final disposition of minor characters, especially servants.

This is a matter of great historical consequence for literature: everybody can now aspire to the glamour of having been dispossessed of a personality. Shakespeare's royal personages trapped at last within the echo chamber of the roles assigned them by destiny and the play have long since lost any exclusive claim to their plight. The middle-class heroine — that inveterate role-player — and then the knave himself have moved center stage, first to tell us who they uniquely are and then, as they keep talking, to reveal that they are nobody in particular. Beckett is a realistic, historical novelist: faced with the historical proliferation of roles and types, of formulae for behavior and phrases for every occasion, who is anybody? It should not, then, be thought peculiar, though it may be disagreeable, when literature assigns less space and volubility to persons than to the various technologies and structures of which they have become the mere instrumentalities. As far back as the obvious example of Melville, *technique* in modern literature is what asks most blatantly for the readers' and the writers' attention. And more often than not the techniques have no emanation from a discoverable human agency. The style cannot be traced back to a character, even to some imaginable psychological shape called the author. Organizational schemes, stylistic fashions seem to blanket, to smother the human presences which they might be expected to serve, much as the political and social organizations of the modern industrial and tech-

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nological state are alleged to desublimate and pacify rather than sustain human energy.

The books I'll be talking about, a few fairly old, some very recent, seem to propose this as the direction of our civilization: that it releases life from invisibility only to ensnare and suppress it. In the progress of *Moby Dick* and *Ulysses,* for example, what happens to the characters we meet at the outset, as in the first thirty-odd chapters of the one and the first six of the other? They stay around, we hear about them, but somehow they get less present to the ear and the eye than do the techniques used to account for the world they live in. Environment, the media in which people exist, moves to the center of interest, dictates the style and shapes the form of the chapters. The techniques that emerge (both the technique of the books and the various technologies and industries being described by the books) get to be more interesting than the characters themselves. Characters become the passive receptors of phenomena from outside; they become all ears, listening to sounds of voices, noises from the street, literary parodies and emulations, music.

The world at its more than Benthamite business, so works of this kind suggest, the blurred, half-identifiable noises the world makes, emanate less from persons than from what corporate humanity has created: the artifact, including those types, characters and roles that impose themselves back upon their creators. It is a question about some modern writers whether the realities they propose are shaped by the exertions of any self or by forces whose existence is prior to any individual human presence and eager to absorb it as one channel of expression. Questions of style must, as a result, become increasingly questions about the media of popular culture as well as of literary convention, and if this offends the sensibilities of certain literary scholars then so much the worse for their scholarship. Not merely who is speaking to whom, but what — what film, what hero of a T.V. series, what pop group — is speaking through the person who thinks it is he who is speaking to someone else. "It's a wise man," says Mailer's D.J. in *Why Are We In Vietnam?,* "who knows *he* is the one who is doing the writer's writing." And when it comes to plot, a similar question presents itself. Instead of being set in motion by the interactions of persons, plot seems to

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issue even more from mythologies about the nature of continuities, as Frank Kermode has been showing, of order and sequence. So that instead of asking about the motive of "so and so," perhaps the better question would be how "so and so" is used, as if persons in literature were like chemical compounds or like particles of energy in movement propelled from the ingredients of the initial chapters.

To borrow a metaphor from *Moby Dick* where Captain Ahab complains that the great whale "heaps him," it can be said that Joyce and Eliot, Melville of course, and such later writers as John Barth, Pynchon and, with a difference, Mailer, predict how we are all to be "heaped" by history, by literature, by the accumulations of myth and allusions, by technologies, cant styles, articulated modes of being which are the world's semblance of logic, its pretense to solidity, its projection of nature. The Homeric analogies in *Ulysses,* the historical notations in *The Waste Land,* are not organizing principles, any more than are the Biblical patternings in Lawrence. They belong to the problem posed rather than to its solution; they are a taunt. So, too, with the analytical rhetoric of *Moby Dick*: the overt symbolic talk, the analyses, the allusiveness. These don't envelop or clarify or organize the other elements of the book. Rather, they are a part of the "heap" which befuddles every effort to locate a stabilizing reality.

Americans can take some pride in *Moby Dick* not because it is in a way like *Ulysses,* but rather because *Ulysses* is like *Moby Dick* and other classics of American 19th-century literature. Gertrude Stein was right when she said that America is the oldest country in the world because it was the first to enter the 20th century. And in our subsequent accumulations of waste are hidden the images which still excite us in our acts of self-creation, the now mixed and reverberating voices out of old radio programs, old movies, new recordings, comic books, boy-and-girlhood books.

The situation is new because of its extraordinary and inescapable intensity, but it of course has precedents. Somewhere in the middle of the last century, long before *Ulysses* or *Middlemarch,* American writing began to discover something counterassertive, something even retaliatory about the world we were and are still making. Hawthorne, Melville and even Thoreau would not have recognized themselves or their country in Whitman's happy con-

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clusion to his preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*: "The proof of the poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." Whitman was not known for his digestive problems.

In their struggle with language and with literary form, the writers I'm discussing become aware, and turn this awareness into modes of expression, that what are supposed to be instruments of knowledge do not offer clarification at all but are part of what needs to be clarified. The chance that everything is cant or destined to become gibberish, explains for me the energy of a "great" writer. He is forever the unaccommodated man, the man continually tensed within any use of language by which he has expressed himself. Each of his best acts is a performance of some daring, the very success of which moves him beyond the results of that act, producing the discomforts which prompt the next one. The great writer learns only that he is never finished, that what he has done will soon become somebody else's convenience, and finally not so much caviar as waste to the general. Perhaps that's all that need be said, supposing it's true, about the inadequacy of literary shapings even for those who make them.

Any account of cultural accumulation and distraction is apt to sound like a version of Henry Adams. He was concerned with the evident inadequacy of the individual mind trying to cope with the accelerating productions of physical energy. The kind of energy which now threatens to overwhelm individual minds is of a somewhat different order, though one of which he was also aware: the energy implanted in myths and metaphors, styles and fashions, in images that insinuate themselves in back of the eyes and ears, there to direct, unless we consciously combat them, even our acts of silent self-imagining. Literary people like to discuss this energy in terms of tradition, usually making the mistake, as I've suggested, of assuming that these traditions are literary ones. Not only through literature, but through all forms of popular culture, through childhood play-acting, role-taking, movies, songs, costumes, psychological theories and what have you—styles and formulations have accumulated which precede us even to those experiences we think the most private and original. Human beings have lost themselves in the variety and completeness of their own corporate invention. No wonder, then,

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that such inventions and the process of their creation have partly displaced persons as the subject of literature, just as in the arrangements of civil and political life those with a radical sense of the self will be tolerated as "historical irrelevants," in the charming words of Zbigniew Bzrezinski, while something called society moves on to the new technetronic age where Systems will take care of everything.

The technetronic planners are properly suspicious of those whose thinking has been conditioned by literary study; they know, much more keenly than do most literary people, the significance of the debate between Leavis and Snow. Three of the great and much used texts of 20th-century criticism, *Moby Dick, Ulysses, The Waste Land,* are written in mockery of system, written against any effort to harmonize discordant elements, against any mythic or metaphoric scheme that would merely historicize contemporary life rather than show it as a force that modifies and even explodes mythic or other organizations. If the dominant form of the literary imagination is radical in its essentially parodistic treatment of systems, then its radicalism is in the interest of essentially conservative feelings about human nature and often agrarian feelings about the proper organizations of social life. Writers in our own time, however much they have escaped from the foolishness of hating airconditioning, have not significantly changed the conservative political implications of the earlier phases of modern literature. Melville, Joyce and Eliot, all differences allowed, discovered that human kind needs to be saved from the various shaping powers even of literature: they discovered their material already encapsulated in the history of literature, its conventions and structures and styles (each of these weighted with presumptions about the nature of reality), and they discovered it, too, in the various philosophical and psychological theories by which the experience of individuals has been codified. In other words, the problem of organizing a self and a destiny for a self within the contexts that impose a self and a destiny — this problem has, for a line of writers going back a hundred years or more, occupied the center of attention once occupied by the exigencies of love and courtship.

The literary rendering of this dehumanizing situation has developed traditions and conventions of its own, which, as advanced now in the works of Norman Mailer, John Barth and Thomas

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Pynchon, to mention only the American contingent, may be thought even tiresomely repetitious. They are in any case more flamboyant and a good deal more politically assertive than are most of their contemporaries in fiction, more political even than the earlier writers they resemble. It's as if they have been forced to see that the issues raised by the works of Melville and Joyce are now inseparable from the issues raised by forms of political repression as described, say, by a radical agrarian like Marcuse, in the chapter of *One-Dimensional Man* entitled "The Closing of the Universe of Discourse."

More than anyone else of his time, Mailer is implicated, in every sense of that word, in the way we live now. He is the great literary contender for the English language in competition not simply with others (he's nearly beyond that) but with anything — transistors, newspapers, tapes, the sound of helicopters, all the media — that presumes to represent reality. It's no holds or obscenities barred, except in his latest and weakest book, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* where he creates false extremities in order to rest, stylistically and politically, at some spectatorial middle ground. At his best he seeks contamination, and does so by adopting the roles, the styles, the sounds that will give him the measure of what it's like to be alive in this country. He takes on the literary responsibility for the condition of our civilization, and of course he's despised by those who simply think the condition will pass if we attend to our classes in literary knitting. He does all this not to wallow but to push through with some renewed sense of his own human shape, with his own unique and liberating sounds. Alien forces can be dealt with, he would seem to say, only by allowing them to become internal, by inducing their internalization — though he finds it increasingly hard to internalize the young — in order that they may be transformed or routed within the battleground of his own organism. In what is still the most penetrating essay about Mailer, even though it appeared in 1962, Diana Trilling points out that "despite Hipsterism's emphasis upon the self, it places on the self the largest possible responsibility for 'the collective creation' (as Mailer calls it) in our culture. 'If society is so murderous,' he asks us, 'then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?' There is of course menace in so primary an inquiry, and Mailer has himself been badly scarred in its pursuit." The body that Mailer imagines as his own is quite

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literally, for him, the body politic; it's therefore proper that he writes so often about vomiting, urinating, bodily stench, feces and the tensed closeness of the organs of creation to the organs of waste.

Mailer has become increasingly aware of the dangers to him of adopting, even for the sake of argument, the historical or political logic which has brought the country to its present difficulties. This awareness is registered in his play with the narrative and syntactical conventions which sustain that logic. A conveniently brief and winning instance occurs early in *The Armies of the Night* where he begins a paragraph "Next Mailer ran into Paul Goodman at the bar" and immediately adds that this is a "short sentence which contains two errors and a misrepresentation." At that discovery Bellow would have gone back and erased the sentence, but for Mailer, the experience being recorded in the sentence is no more significant than is the experience of writing the sentence. In the act of writing he catches himself slipping into reportorial conventions, with all the distortions they entail, which he sets out to berate on the first pages by quoting *The New York Times* report of his conduct in Washington. He inadvertently commits the crimes he's been exposing.

The self whose history is being reported in *The Armies of the Night* acted in the past within limiting circumstances peculiar to that moment in the past; the self who is making the report, doing the writing, is acting in the present under quite different historical and, above all, literary pressures. The Mailer of the march to the Pentagon is not the Mailer writing about the march, which means that there has to be yet another, a third Mailer, the one who is anxious to make this distinction. The highly involuted narrative organization of *Why Are We In Vietnam?* reveals even more fully Mailer's wariness about the potential traps of reportorial or narrative or interpretive acts. As a result, the hero D.J. (Disc Jockey to the World) from whose mind the novel is taken, as from a tape, is allowed to exhaust all the possible implications of what has happened to him and what he is freely allowed to imagine happening to everyone else. Like Vidal's Myra Breckinridge, D.J. is a superb interpretive critic, among his many talents, and he gives several spiritedly obscene throw-away interpretations to the readers, especially professorial ones — "Yes, professor, you may keep the change, for

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D.J. is, mean to say, *has* got more than a finger into the cunt of genius, Madame Muse."

Indeed, there is hardly anywhere beyond his interpretations for the interpreter to reach. D.J.'s sputtering excess of analysis, his criticisms of the stagnations of narrative recapitulation, his slangy resurrection of theories that Mailer in essays of earlier years had expounded with a seriousness nearly professorial — all these are presented as if none had any special status. Like the catalogue of hunting guns which takes up maybe an undue portion of the book, D.J.'s ideas, theories and interpretations have the programmed, inhumanly accelerated speed of a disc jockey whose mind has been electrified. The material pours forth as part of the flow of "numbers, details, and all sorts of overspecific data as if it were scum, slime, pollen slick, floating twigs and wet rotting leaves all meandering a dead-ass stream." At last everything is "shit." D.J. and his friend Tex Hyde make a lyrically described effort during an Alaskan safari to separate themselves from it by leaving the other hunters — D.J.'s father ("the highest grade of asshole made in America") and his flunkies, the M.A. or Medium Assholes (an apt McLuhanite pun). Leaving their rifles behind, they go into the Alaskan wilderness, beyond the Arctic Circle in search of bear.

Analogies are abundantly obvious to a similar though more exacting relinquishment of power by Faulkner's Isaac McCaslin, who leaves behind him his watch, stick and compass in addition to his gun as the precondition of his seeing the legendary bear. While Isaac's act of "relinquishment" succeeds in placing him ultimately in a new relation to his inheritance, the effort by D.J. and Tex fails, and it is possible to make a pseudo-Marxist paradigm of the difference: in the progress from agricultural to capitalistic to industrial and thence to the technological levels of society it becomes increasingly difficult and finally impossible to get, as the boys hope, "the fear, shit, disgust, and mixed shit tapeworm out of fucked up guts and overcharged nerves." Faulkner's Isaac can put aside his inheritance in *The Bear,* but Mailer's boys cannot divest themselves of the technological world of their inheritance: it is literally tuned into their heads, and while in the wilderness their electrically charged minds are joined to one another and to the magnetic fields of the wild North; they return to camp and find "the older men's voices were

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filled with the same specific mix of mixed old shit which they had heard before in the telepathic vaults of their new Brooks Range electrified mind." The singular "mind" is intended: D.J. (it can stand for Dr. Jekyll) and Tex (whose last name is Hyde) are finally one, electronically fused and headed for Vietnam. So much for the effectiveness now of prewar literary rituals that still worked a scant thirty years ago. The boys themselves speak of their trek as a "purification ceremony," or rather at one point D.J. reports that Tex has managed to "get the purification ceremony straight in his head." D.J. knows this by telepathy, as if the phrase is simply "in the air," part of the setup, in case any professional explicators should decide to pounce with Faulkner at the ready. For D.J. and Tex a "purification ceremony" might not be exactly their "thing" but with all that American literature behind them, going back to Emerson at least, it's surely a "thing" for any red-blooded American boy to do, given the chance.

Barth and Pynchon share with Mailer an awareness of potential human submergence in the materials that literature has helped to invent and that technology transforms into platitude and ultimately into waste. So far, however, there has been less daring self-projection in their works than in Mailer's — or in Burroughs' or Ginsberg's, for that matter — less belief, perhaps, in the reality of history as a force physically as well as imaginatively felt. They don't propose their bodies as both source and victim of antagonistic agents, and they seem to me to exhibit, as a result, less of the stylistic energy that is the reflex of Mailer's sense of physical embattlement. The narrator-hero of Barth's *End of the Road,* who in his first sentence sounds a bit like D.J. — "I am, in a sense, Jacob Horner" — idealizes "articulateness" to a degree that nicely hints at Barth's Protean enterprise as a novelist:

> Articulation! There by Joe, was *my* absolute, if I could be said to have one. At any rate, it is the only thing I can think about which I ever had, with any frequency at all, the feeling one usually has for one's absolutes. To turn experience into speech — that is to classify, to categorize, to conceptualize, to grammarize, to syntactify it — is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man alive and kicking. . . . When my mythoplastic

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> razors were sharply honed, it was unparalleled sport to lay about with them, to have at reality. In other senses, of course, I didn't believe this at all.

The intellectual sportiveness of this passage belongs as much to Barth as does the intellect of D.J. to Mailer, to a mind casual with the mythologies that permeate it, unintimidated by received ideas, inventive of theories just for the fun of it, a mind that makes structures only to undermine them, that borrows allegories only to flout them. The personality vigorously alive in those zestful infinitives would obviously cast aside any absolute, any design that tried to encircle it. In *Giles Goat-Boy,* as in his latest selection of short pieces *Lost in the Fun House,* Barth writes to question the authenticity of what he's doing. Before *Giles Goat-Boy* even begins, there is a "publisher's disclaimer" and a "cover letter to the editors and publishers" pretending that the entire manuscript was written not by Barth but by someone or by something else. And yet if articulation is no satisfactory absolute, there are none in Barth more satisfactory; if laying about with mythoplastic razors is merely a sport, there is in his novels no activity that brings him or his characters much closer to reality. The passage is as breezy a dismissal of modern literary–psychological practices as one could probably find. For what's ultimately suggested is that life and experience are not discovered so much as betrayed by these practices, that life goes on not in them but only outside them. With something like Laurence Sterne's comic sentiment, Barth implies that life exists not in form so much as in accident and in casual digression from form. At the same time, he is necessarily resolute in registering those formal arrangements of life that make the freedom for digression increasingly difficult. *Giles Goat-Boy* is a dazzlingly intricate allegory of the political–philosophical–academic–literary–sexual life of these times, but the intricacy of the pattern is spoofed by the blatant clarity of most of the allegorical items in it.

Here again, literature contemporary with us resembles some classic works of the modernist tradition in that it so loudly proclaims its mythic and metaphoric identifications. So much so that critics ought not to congratulate themselves for discovering them. They should instead ask questions about the very enterprise of such shapings and designings — theirs and the author's. The complexity and

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interest of this novel resides not in its allegorical identifications, not in mythological filaments that can be traced back to the Greek drama or to the literature of existentialism, but rather in the fantastic proliferation, intermixture and confusion of these, in the blurring excess of meanings. We are invited to feel the nightmarish fusions among literary, political, sexual, anthropological and historical myths. Such an accomplishment requires that Barth be as adroitly in command as he proves to be of the English language, of English and classical literature, of present-day politics and of pop culture. He can manage even within the small area of a paragraph to mix the cants appropriate to any of these and to show how they overlap, and he takes delight in violating silly but slow-dying critical rules about maintaining consistency in point of view. More than merely playing literary tricks and games here, he is really questioning the stability of what we take to be natural and obvious in the political, physical and sexual organizations of life. The implication is that the human imagination, out of which all of these have issued, is impossibly entangled in its own creations, and that it would get even more entangled by any further effort on the part of interpretive critics to sort it all out.

We have been classified, so to speak, by the most limiting inventions that have been made about our own species, and if this is unpleasant news for anyone, it is especially distasteful for the industrious explicator — it means that the books which subscribe to this view of contemporary existence really do not need analysis or translation. Such books do the work themselves, with nearly obnoxious persistence. Indeed one can read Barth's earlier novels retrospectively as a warning that analysis isn't merely a further contribution to distraction and intellectual waste: it may even be psychologically debilitating. Wholly to sort out the filaments of the allegorical dream world we've made for ourselves is to arrive at a clarified sense of life at once dreary and pointless. We *need* to delude ourselves. If all categories and structures are equally inconclusive, then all are equally good, and are apparently necessary to the conduct of life. From such a view it is only a step to the conclusion that psychoanalysis is not so much wrong as unnecessary. In this particular novel the refusal to deal with human actions as if they existed for psychological rather than for philosophical inquiry allows Barth to treat sex with an openness scarcely matched since the Circe episode of

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Ulysses. This freedom is licensed by the fact that the hero is possibly part goat, probably fathered by a machine and has been nurtured in ways that absolve him from the human burdens of guilt and suffering. Giles only begins to suffer at the end when, married, a father and founder of a sect, he develops a human consciousness of time and therefore of love and death. He decides that perhaps truth is found only in the loving eye, not in any of the various efforts he has made to fill the mythic and allegorical roles assigned him as goat, human, grand tutor or even husband.

And here, as in most of the extraordinarily intricate, multiple plotted and hyperbolicized works of this century, there is something as poignant as it is recurrent: that when the imagination manages to push through contrivance and into those areas of irreducible, often inarticulate human needs, it discovers that these are heartbreakingly simple. There is scarcely any language for them, perhaps only, as George Eliot imagines, "that roar which lies on the other side of silence," while we go about our business "well-madded with stupidity." The most complicated examples of 20th-century literature, like *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land,* the end of which seems parodied by the end of *Giles,* are more than contemptuous of their own formal and stylistic elaborateness. Finally, as in Faulkner's *The Bear,* such books ultimately appeal to "the heart's truth," in terms so simple as to be subverted by the formal complications in which they're embedded, much as they are lost within the stuffed complications of modern consciousness. It's politically important, I think, that such radical (and conservative) simplicities are also the mainstay of those younger people who today express their antagonism to the structured world less in violence than in a terminology that borders on silence, in totemic words like "peace," "love," the hummed "om" of Ginsberg, in chants and in bodily freedom. Nakedness and relinquishment — the astonishingly persistent goals of the heroes of antiindustrial and particularly of American literature — are still the goals of the heroes of the works I'm discussing, even of Mailer's Rojack in *An American Dream,* when he wishes finally to be done with the magic and plotting that provide the substance of the book's fiction, and pleads to "let me love that girl and become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work." Such an appeal will seem peculiar only to those who don't know how essen-

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tially conservative an idea "hip" turns out to be. Barth writes not merely in praise of such needs and virtues (and Mailer only momentarily proposes them), but like a man who has decided (as the contemporary young are reluctant to do) that he really must search for them through the labyrinths that have been made of life by history and literature, by criticism and even by the very novel he is in the act of writing.

I am describing a literature whose structural and stylistic properties are given a status equivalent to systems of a politically and psychically repressive kind. In Thomas Pynchon's work much the same repressive and dictatorial power is located in yet another element of the literary imagination — the element of plotting — and this, too, is a distinguishing feature of the contemporary political imagination. *V.*, his first novel, is designed to indict its own comic elaborateness. The various quests of V. are interwoven fantastically; they are made preposterously coherent. As in Barth, the participation of Pynchon's characters in this maze of fabrication precludes their participation in more human plots, the search for love and the discovery of friendship even within their pathetic tribal huddles. The knotty entanglements of plot in Pynchon's novels are meant to testify to waste — a word prominently displayed on the inside cover of his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* — the waste of imagination that creates and is then enslaved by its own plottings, machines, the products of its technology. Except for the heroine of *V.*, Rachel Owlglass, and the heroine of *The Crying of Lot 49,* Oedipa Maas — lovable, hapless, decent, eager girls — both novels are populated by self-mystified people running as if on command from the responsibilities of love to the fascination of puzzles and the power of things. No plot, political, novelistic or personal, can issue from the circumstances of love, from the simple human needs, say, of Rachel or of Oedipa, and Pynchon implicitly mocks this situation by the Byzantine complications of the plot by which his characters choose, if that is the right word, to be manipulated.

Gestures of warmth are the more touching in his novels for being terrifyingly intermittent, shy and worried. The coda of the first novel (which I had the astonishment of reviewing with no prior warning as to its brilliance when it first came out in 1963) is enunciated by the jazz player McClintock Sphere, and it serves well

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enough for the second: "Love with your mouth shut, help without breaking your ass or publicizing it; keep cool but care." This is the stoical resolve of an embattled underground in a world increasingly governed by Ionesco's rhinoceri, to mention a vision markedly similar to Pynchon's. Efforts at human communications are lost among Pynchon's characters, nearly all of whom are obsessed with the presumed cryptography in the chance juxtaposition of things, in the music and idiom of bars like the Vino or the Scope or merely in "the vast sprawl of houses" that Oedipa sees outside Los Angeles, reminding her of the printer circuit of a transistor radio with its "intent to communicate."

Even the title *V.* is cryptographic. Available to all interpretations, it is answerable to none. Though the letter V probably did not have Vietnam as one of its meanings in 1963, the novel so hauntingly evokes the preconditions of international disaster that Vietnam must retrospectively be added to the long list of its other possible meanings. In that part of the novel, nearly half, given to an international melodrama of spying in the years since the Fashoda incident of 1898, *V.* shows how international, no less than personal, complications accumulate from an interplay of fantasies constructed by opposing sides, each sustaining the other's dream of omnipotence, each justifying its successes by evoking the cleverness of its opposition, each creating the opposition, and, in some mysterious and crazy way, the moves and successes of the other side as a provocation to its own further action.

"Plots" are an expression in Pynchon of the mad belief that some plot can ultimately take over the world, can ultimately control life to the point where it is manageably inanimate. And the ascription of plots to an opposition is a way of explaining why one's own have not achieved this ultimate control. Nearly from the outset, the people of Pynchon's novels are the instruments of the plots they then help promote. Their consequent dehumanization makes the prospect of an apocalyse and the destruction of self not a horror so much as the final ecstasy of plotting and of power. In international relations the ecstasy is thermonuclear war; in human relationships it can be sadomasochism with skin itself as leather, leather a substitute for skin, where parts of the body are made of jewelry or metal, interchangeable, detachable, unscrewable. Pynchon makes this process

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inseparable from the most ordinary aspects of contemporary urban life, particularly in *The Crying of Lot 49*. The process is not a metaphor for daily life but a part of its real substance, while on the margin, only precariously within the realm of this fantastically plotted existence, are the plotless and drifting young, of whose tribal mores Pynchon has a stylistic grasp unmatched by any of his contemporaries.

Rudolf Wurlitzer in *Nog*, his recent first novel, makes the most serious effort since Pynchon to create a style that renders similar states of being in which separate identities can barely be located and, when they are, seem merely accidental. Identities fuse and separate without intention and without feeling, as if persons had the consistency of air, with no one able to find himself in himself, in anyone else or, with any certainty, even in space. For Wurlitzer to have achieved a stylistic approximation of these conditions is an accomplishment of some historic consequence, showing that our language can manage to reach into those areas of contemporary life where, among its young inhabitants, there is mostly silence. Where the action is, however, where the noise of history is being made, there is the grotesqueness to which silence and marginality are the dreary alternatives. Grotesqueness in Pynchon is defined not merely by the bizarre but, as in the most exact meaning of the term, by the distorting combinations in which the human figure may be discovered, mixed with the inanimate produce in the trash heaps of civilization. Civilization has been overgenerous to these novelists in providing designs for living and for writing, and to that very degree it has made life itself, and the life in language, increasingly difficult to come by.

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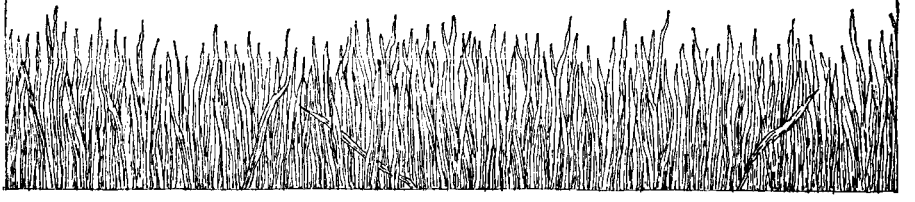
THE DERANGED COUSINS

BY EDWARD GOREY



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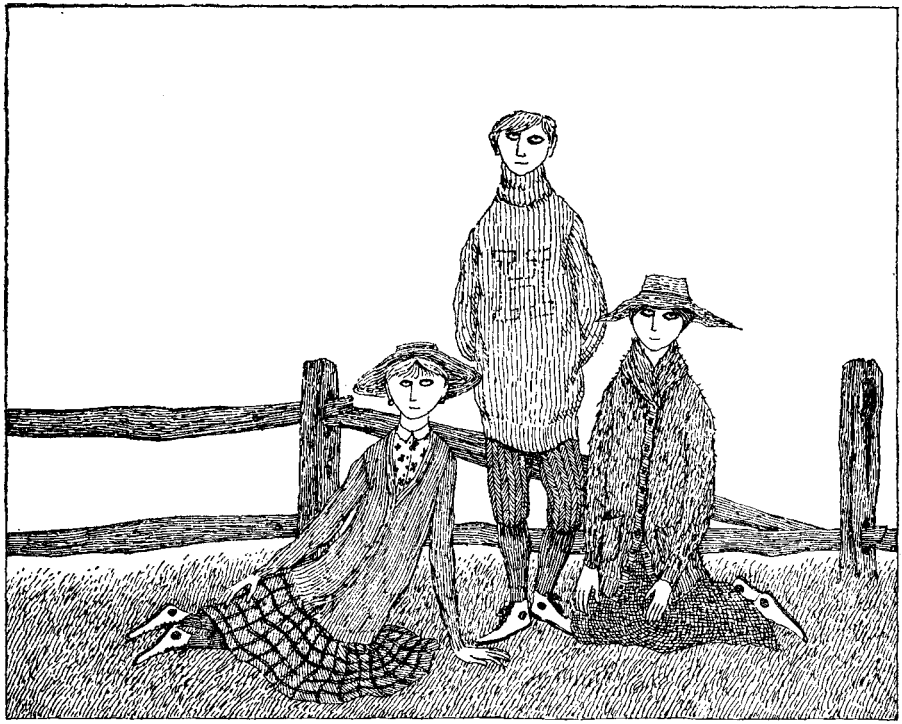

Seventy-nine years ago there were three cousins whose names were Rose Marshmary, Mary Rosemarsh, and Marsh Maryrose.

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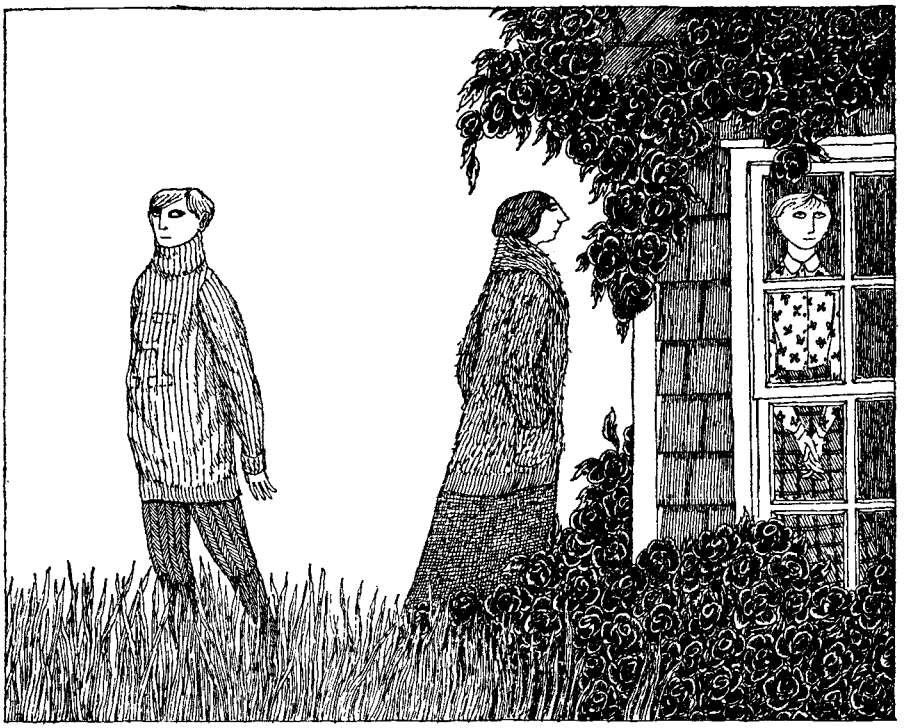

They lived in a house covered with roses on the edge of a marsh.

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Since they were orphans and there was nobody to stop them, they were often merry far into the night.

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In the daytime they picked up things left by the tide.

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One September afternoon Rose and Mary quarreled over a bedslat.

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Mary struck Rose with a brown china doorknob she had already found and killed her.

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She had Marsh bury her in a field known as the Rabbits' Restroom.

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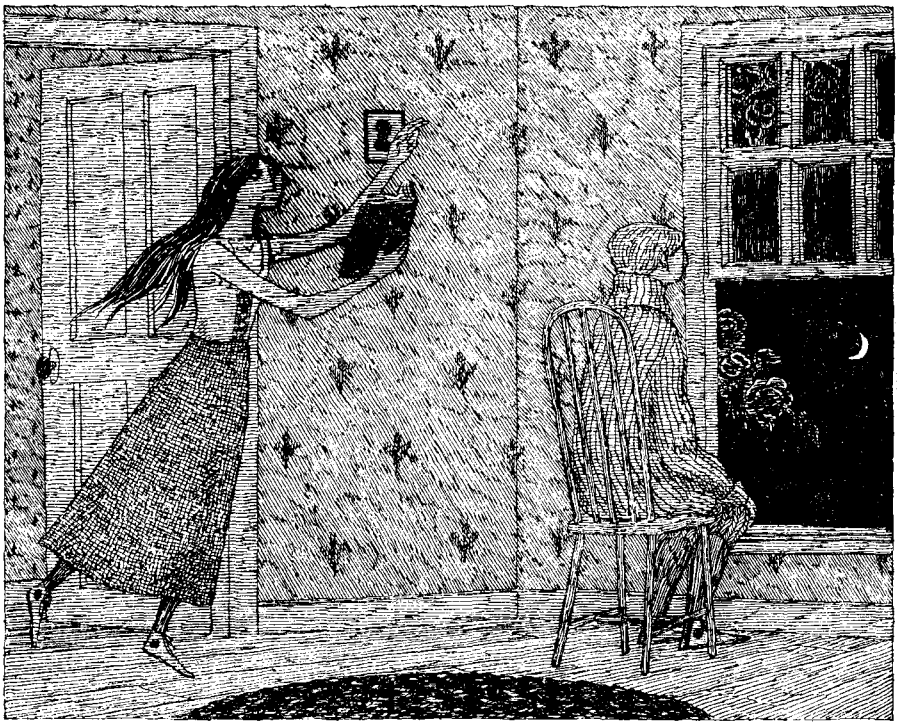

This incident caused her to become a religious maniac.

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Shortly thereafter Marsh took to drink.

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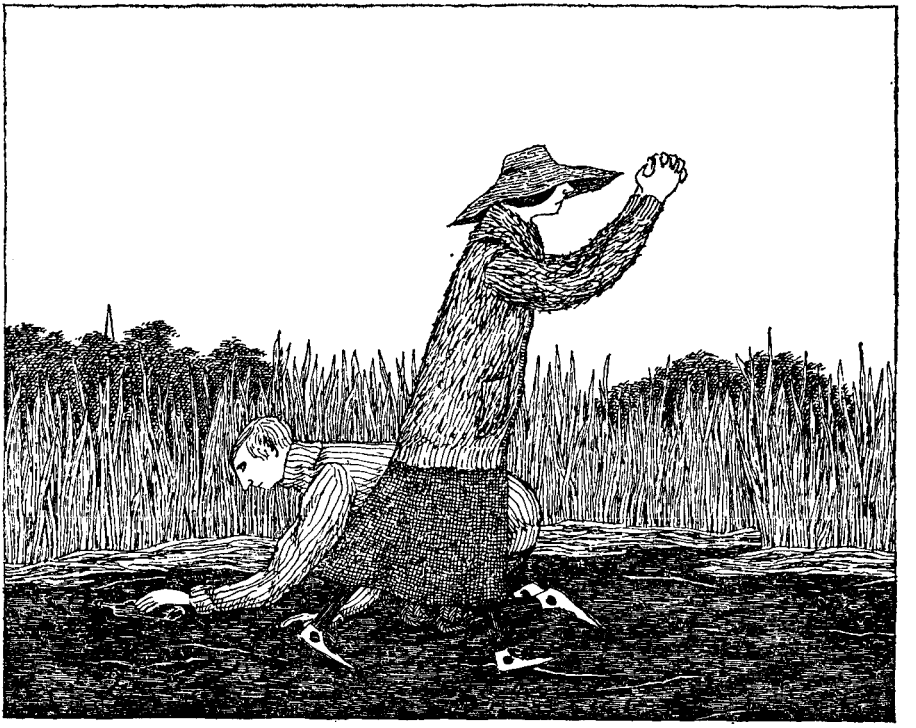

One April morning he drank the dregs of a bottle of vanilla extract he discovered in the mud.

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They must have been contaminated, for he died in agony during the night.

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Mary conducted a funeral service by herself that lasted the whole day and then buried him near Rose.

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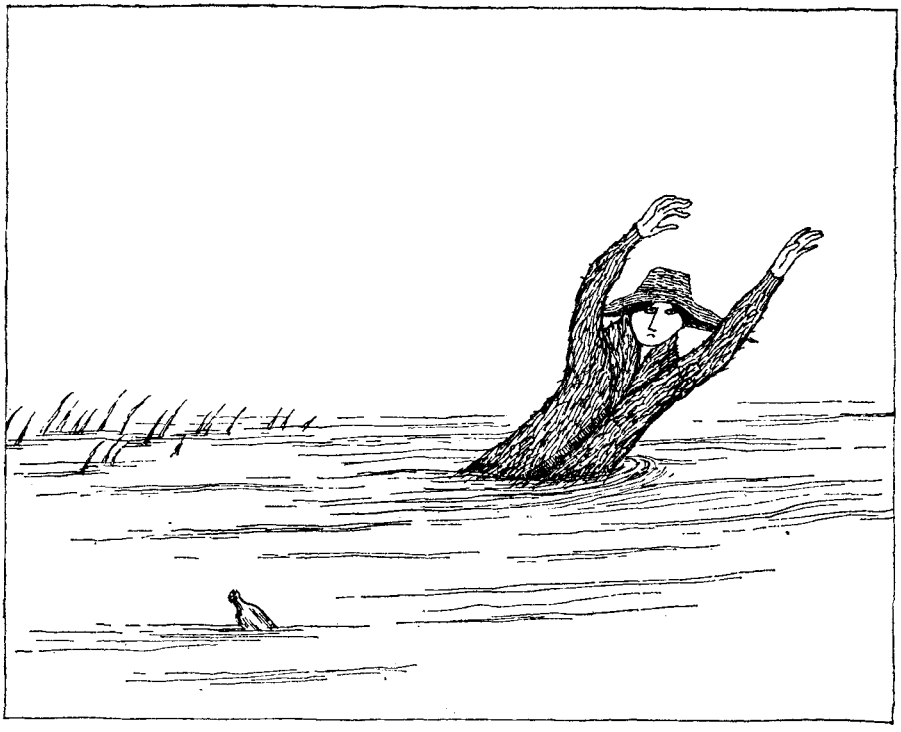

The next winter she was carried off by an unusually high tide.

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They never found her body.

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Norman Birnbaum

THE MAKING OF A VANGUARD

I. The Technical Intelligentsia

Capitalist and neo-capitalist societies in America and Western Europe particularly have been marked by an internal development of the greatest significance, which, while it is based on a change in the production processes, is creating a new class structure. Knowledge has become a factor in the production process, and in response what can be called the technical intelligentsia has not only grown enormously but has assumed the role of a new class in modern society, affecting the life of traditional institutions and classes. A new avant-garde has been formed; and some tentative notions can be advanced about its political meaning.

For knowledge has become a factor not only in technology but in the applied social sciences as well, in law and administration, in economics and social research. Indeed, the fusion of administrative, political and productive processes in neo-capitalism, as in the emergence of a "defense" economy in the U.S. and in the regulation of the private sector by the state everywhere, has made it difficult to draw the line between production and administration, and has made it virtually impossible to distinguish between "political" and "economic" decisions. Weber defined a market free to develop under the protection of a rational–legal state as essential to the emergence of rational capitalism; now entire societies are programmed as markets. Historically, something of the Saint-Simonian vision of an organization of society by the "industrialists" has been realized — with one conspicuous difference: the higher rationality of the whole is missing, and centralization is operated against, and not on behalf of, the interests of the collectivity. Knowledge, in these circumstances, does mean power — not the power of the collectivity over nature but of those who control the organization and application of knowledge.

But the importance of knowledge in the production process does not mean direct power to the knowers: they are employed; and knowledge is bought. Those with intellectual and technical skills do not exercise autonomous direction of production and the associated social

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processes. Rather, they apply their skills on behalf of those who command property. And while property holders by no means constitute a monolithic group, they are not guided by exclusively technical interests. Despite the importance of technical skill today, societies of our type are not ruled by a technocratic elite. In fact, a technocratic elite would have immense difficulty in developing purely technical criteria for political decisions.

Nevertheless, the upper reaches of the technical intelligentsia (higher civil servants, private managers, directors of the communications and knowledge industries) do manifest a technocratic consciousness, based in part on a proper sense of their role in industrial society, but in part also on an ideology designed to advance their interests as a group. This consciousness may be elaborated as a doctrine of the limits of political decision (ministers propose but bureaucrats dispose) or it may refer to the supposed independence of the technocrats from market considerations (in which case it merges with the ideology of "public service" utilized by the great corporations to legitimize their economic and political power).

The technical intelligentsia, which comprises a variety of occupations, is vertically divided, and its members are at different distances from those who command this new hierarchy of skills, who are themselves at one remove from those who actually dominate the political and economic bureaucracies. The rapid increase of positions for the technical intelligentsia does not necessarily mean they have a rapprochement with their employers, even if a technical career might represent a move up.

In the circumstances, the technical intelligentsia, (which in the United States has grown from 8 to 13 percent of the labor force since 1950) must employ its acquired skills by selling its labor power to bureaucratic employers. The supposed "professionalization" of certain newer intellectual occupations has been accompanied by a bureaucratization of professional activity generally. In this sense, "professionalization" means a certain control of entry into privileged employment, not the emergence of new sets of bourgeois virtuosi into a substantively as well as formally free labor market. Technical and intellectual labor responds not only to the advance of the sciences, but to the need for a trained and specialized (as distinct from an educated and cultivated) labor force.

II. The Universities

Partly in response to demands of advanced societies, the universities everywhere have grown enormously. While immediate problems (overcrowding, the diminished effectiveness of a teaching corps which has

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not expanded nearly as fast as the student body) are obvious, what is more important is the inadequacy of university traditions to the requirements of social elites aware of the importance of science and technology. European universities in particular prepared students already inducted into high bourgeois culture by their families for a limited set of occupations: teaching, the professions, government services. The new importance of technology, the growth of the new labor force, have disturbed that very tentative balance between social demand and educational supply. The new student body is recruited from a far more heterogenous social background (if still one from which the working class is largely excluded) and must make its way in a diversified occupational system. Recent educational planning, therefore, has adopted American (and Soviet) models of a functionalized university system, in which "production" of graduates (a term which is in itself expressive of the mentality of the educational planners) is supposed to match the needs of the economy for a trained labor force. But the "functionalization" of the educational process is not complete: large numbers of students are educated in a manner which bears no discernible relationship to their later occupational opportunities. This is not simply a matter of adjustment to more accurate projections of future manpower needs: the students are encouraged by an outmoded university structure to master a general culture, in reality fragmented, and they sense the contradiction. In sum, the students are inculcated with bourgeois humanist conceptions of individual intellectual and cultural attainment — but precisely as a preliminary to bureaucratic employment in a society which may properly be deemed post-bourgeois. Insofar as the universities have attempted to adapt to the newer social forms of a changed process of production, they have organized intellectual work in a bureaucratic manner which is all the more repellent because of its formal dissonance with the intellectual content of an historically elaborated system of high culture. That system can now be seen as experiencing a process of ossification (consider the virulent hostility in the slogans of the May rising in Paris to high culture). What is significant here is that both the technocratic innovators who would rationalize the universities and the younger socialists who would make of the academies new bases for revolutionary action wish for a changed relationship of high culture to *praxis*. The universities are confronted with multiple and contradictory pressures, and in the absence of any overall idea of their function — while using a rhetoric often absurdly remote from their actual aims and activities — the universities have been able to operate in the ensuing crisis only by a desperate reinforcement of their authoritarian and hierarchical tendencies (which were supportable only as long as there was a relative constancy and plausibility in the university's function).

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III. The Students

The almost comic inadequacy of the universities' structures and traditions is no secret. A student generation raised in (relative) prosperity is asked to prepare for elite positions in the exploiting fraction of global society, while within Western society proper, the new generation is expected to maintain existing systems of domination and inequality. The maximum development of intellectual powers, demanded by the universities, conflicts with the conformist psychology required for bureaucratic careers. Not yet fully integrated into the career system, and not yet therefore using human power (in the form of higher culture) in the pursuit of goals set by an inhuman social mechanism, the students have assumed the role of surrogates for the missing humanity of their educated elders. The students' frequent unreflected rejection of cultural tradition, the shallowness of much of their own version of high culture, the denial by some of the articulate students that culture can be both "high" and meaningful, are indeed deplorable. Does not much of the blame lie with the students' teachers, who have been unable to transmit a viable tradition?

Critical intelligence has served as a unique refracting medium for the crisis. Practically alone the students have thought about a better future: the faculties' discontents have not led them to a more general awareness of contradictions, injustices and brutalities. It is characteristic of the student movement everywhere that it has sought allies, or more precisely allied itself with, the unprivileged. The global underclass has been a favored object of student concern: the Vietnam conflict actually has crystallized earlier tendencies in the student movement. The enormous force of student resistance to the war in Vietnam was preceded by an alliance of the most conscious and active of the student critics of American society with the American underclass itself, at first with the black population in the South and then in the North. It was the extention of the campaign for civil rights to the North, the discovery of the resistance of the system as a whole to those changes which would assure the blacks a fair share in American life, that contributed to the radicalization of a student generation which had started out with a "liberal" ideology, in the American use of the term. That is to say, a new kind of American socialism, in the broadest sense, has developed among those who began by supposing that they were simply serving as catalysts to the conscience of a society committed to a welfare politics. In both the alliance with the blacks and the campaign against the war in Vietnam, the American student movement has been conspicuously distant from the American labor movement, the preferred instrument of whose leaders is the American Democratic Party and the preferred policies of whose members are often imperialistic, chauvinistic and racist.

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In France, the student movement (aided by other intellectuals and the left university teachers' organization) led the movement against the war in Algeria in a period in which the unions and the French Communist Party were far from prominent in their opposition. In Germany, the SDS (Sozialistischer Deutsche Studentenbund) was expelled from the Social Democratic Party and ever since has had at best ambiguous and at worst hostile relationships to the German trade unions. The alliance of students and younger workers in the French May events, as exciting and portentous as it was, has not proven durable: the majority of the French working class has remained, after the initial wave of enthusiasm for the general strike in May, quite loyal to the established and bureaucratic leadership of the traditional French left. The choice of allies by the student movements, then, reflects their awareness of their isolation from the traditional socialist and reformist forces. The student movement as a self-designated socialist vanguard has quite abandoned (and been abandoned by) the organization of the working class.

But despite their relative isolation, the students seem to have revivified everywhere some of the most profound critical traditions. In the United States, everyone talks of "pragmatism" and means by this a resolution *not* to experiment, to support the bureaucratic centralization characteristic of a society dominated by giant corporate enterprise. The American student movement, however (and some of its adult mentors), takes "pragmatism" quite seriously: it intends to experiment with new forms of communal association and control, and manifests a curiously Yankee faith in the possibilities of a humanity living on a different scale. Like the German and French students, the American students see bureaucratization as the incarnation of the forces against which they are struggling; they therefore refuse political solutions which would entail the utilization of bureaucracy for different or newer ends. And they justify their refusal by citing the sociological principle that large-scale organizations tend to dictate societal ends as well as means.

The French and German student movements, which confront stagnant yet formidable working-class movements, have had the advantage of working with a socialist tradition, if a desiccated one. Not surprisingly, they have turned to neglected aspects of those traditions. In France, the vocabulary and program of the student revolt constituted a rebirth of the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, once so prominent in French socialism—much to the astonishment and dismay of that most Leninist of parties, the French Communist Party. In Germany, the student movement's efforts to mobilize working-class support have followed from theories of mass action derived from Rosa Luxemburg's critique of German Social Democracy's rigidity. Both the German and French student movements,

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finally, have reached a theoretical level far more complex and advanced than attained by the American movement—again, quite in accord with national political traditions. (It is commonly supposed that theoretically the German SDS has been a tutor to the rest of the European movement. But the popularity and spontaneity of the May revolution among the French students should not obscure the considerable theoretical work which prepared for the rising—even if it took the younger French socialist theorists by surprise.)

The student movement, then, could be said to constitute a socialist avant-garde in an epoch in which the socialist traditions of the working class have been severely attenuated. The question is whether the students can form the nucleus of a new socialist alliance in a new period. Here one should distinguish between radical (or revolutionary) student organizations and the radicalization of other student groups. The radical or revolutionary student movements do not appear to comprise more than 10 percent of any given student body. It is quite true that in moments of crisis the student left has been able to activate radical impulses among ostensibly more neutral student organizations. In each instance, however, leadership by the radical organizations was made possible by an initial alliance of a militant left and a moderate or hitherto dormant center about issues directly connected with the condition of the students in the universities. The great majority of students in the western universities have not generalized their critique of the universities to a critique of society. Temporary bursts of radical energy (the Berkeley revolt, the French May rising) do subside, and while they leave an enlarged radical remnant, the fact is that only a minority of students have as yet been radicalized. But the tendency towards radicalization seems to continue unchecked; it has spread to the academic secondary schools; and a newer group of young university and secondary school teachers will soon be graduated from the student movement to posts in which they can influence the young.

Who are the student radicals? In the first instance, they seem nowhere to comprise more than 10 percent of the student body. (In the United States, entire institutions — technical ones, or those patronized by lower-middle-class and working-class students — are untouched by student radicalism. The strike at San Francisco State College may represent an enlargement of the previous middle-class base of the radical student movement. The black American students, of course, are radical for their own reasons.) They seem to come from families with radical or liberal traditions, and often from bourgeois families. Proletarianization for them, then, may lie in the future: it does not reside in their past. Further, with the significant exception of the French May rising and

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certain recent disturbances in the German technical schools, the student movement has until now been led by students of the humanities and social sciences. Pure and applied scientists and medical students and teachers were involved in May in France; their concern was the social uses of their knowledge as well as with the organization of instruction and inquiry. This may well indicate a change in the basis of the student movement in the future, but for the moment it could be said that the most consistently radical students in the movement have been those not facing imminent induction into the administrative and productive process.

Again, the recent one-day moratorium on research among scientists and technologists may indicate a change. Precisely why students of sociology, in particular, should be prominent in the movement is not easy to answer. Once intended as a discipline encompassing the understanding of society as a whole, sociology has often been degraded to a set of research techniques useful as instruments of administrative technology. The students, more interested in critical traditions than in techniques, have found intellectual incentives for questioning this world in portrayals of it which insist on its immutability. (It is true also that in France and Germany, especially, sociology has been taught by a few radical university professors.) At any rate, were we obliged to find a brief formulation, we should have to say that the radical student movement has been led by "the intellectuals" among the students. This remains true even where, as in the United States, certain of the radical leaders manifest a considerable disdain for intellectual tradition.

IV. The Intellectuals

While the technical intelligentsia can be described as a determinate group within the labor force, they are distinct from "the intellectuals" of a society. Each term refers to groups with a higher education and to traditions of higher culture. But intellectuals have spoken out on matters of public concern. Their activities have been communally regulated, by the interplay of public response with the intellectuals' own idea of relevance. United in informal but effective groups, the intellectuals through these groups have exhibited a limited but definite autonomy. The regulation of the technical intelligentsia, by contrast, takes place by the rules governing professional or technical activity, and their autonomy is considerably more restricted than that of the intellectuals: both their skills, and the functions to which they are put are determined not by themselves but by their employers.

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I am aware that my distinction between intellectuals and the technical intelligentsia may be derived from a previous phase in the social organization of intellectual activity. The intellectual, in this scheme, does bear a conspicuous resemblance to the individual (if hypothetical) participant in the free market. His autonomy may be as much a matter of the relatively open market for intellectual work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as of the conception of homo faber bound to bourgeois activity in general. It would follow that we require a new conception of intellectuals, encompassing recent changes in the intellectual market. Nevertheless, for the moment let us take as a minimal criterion for distinguishing intellectuals from the technical intelligentsia their relative remoteness from the administrative and productive process in industrial societies.

The intellectuals are artists, writers, scientists in the pure rather than the applied fields of the natural sciences, scholars in the human sciences not directly involved in the manipulation of behavior. Some intellectuals may from time to time accept employment in which they are used for purposes different from their own. The boundaries are often unclear, but the existence of two different areas of activity — technical and intellectual — is hardly in doubt. Indeed, when agencies of power call upon intellectuals it is not always for the purpose of inducting them into the discipline of power. It is precisely the disinterestedness and novelty of free intellectual activity that men of power find attractive and useful. (It is one of the ironies of our present situation that so many intellectuals strive to identify with the perspectives of kings, while their rulers value them for their activity as thinkers.)

The critics of the intellectuals among the powerful and practical (and those most embittered of critics, the self-hating segment of the intellectuals) have made too much of the supposed defects inherent in the intellectuals' position. Remoteness from a certain experience of reality, they argue, has led the intellectuals to abstract and extreme formulations, which in the end may be little more than the ideology of a special interest group. But if "reality" is defined as the assumptions intrinsic to a system of power, the intellectuals' resistance to this definition (a resistance which has at times taken on quite explicitly reactionary forms) may contain within it the possibilities for alternative definitions, critiques of reality which could in time lead to alternative social institutions. The cultivation, for example, of the idea of wholeness, of the notion of life as a work of art, is certainly a part of intellectual tradition. The fact that in critical instances the intellectuals speak to others than themselves, and precisely to the members of the technical intelligentsia, attests not merely to their attention to public issues. It

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expresses the fascination exercised upon those who cannot, or who are not allowed to, think freely by those whose metier is free thought — or something like it.

Free thought, then, is a primary source of the intellectuals' politics. Hence their tendency toward abstraction: the intellectuals of a movement, or of a class, may be among the first to comprehend the historical implications of the moment experienced by others simply in its concreteness. The bourgeois thinkers (like Marx) who saw in the sects of artisans and the inchoate protests of the new proletariat the beginnings of a totally new society, and the German imperial (and later Nazi) theorists who pushed to logical conclusions the instinctive anti-Semitism of more popular German groupings, each illustrate at opposite moral and political poles a certain ideological consistency, even ruthlessness, among the intellectuals. Combined with their eccentric relation to the market and later to the bureaucratic organization of intellectual activity, these traits have often enabled the intellectuals to see the contradictions of a society at a given moment in its development. There are countless examples but one point is clear: the intellectuals' distance from certain kinds of practical activity, their repugnance for certain forms of bureaucracy, their attachment to abstract versions of bourgeois tradition rather than to the substratum of bourgeois activity, their familiar quest for sinecures in the interstices of bureaucratized intellectual systems, combine to endow them with what was once an anticapitalist and is now an antibureaucratic ethos.

It does not follow that this must produce a socialist politics, since it can also produce political conservatism and, indeed, even some kind of fascism. At present, however, the intellectuals seem divided between two positions. The first encompasses what can be described as critical endorsement of the bureaucratic organization of society. An alteration in priorities, a more just distribution of the social product, a broadening of the basis of higher culture (assumed to be relatively intact and in the possession of contemporary elites, of course) — in short, perfectly plausible reformist solutions to present conflicts are envisaged as not only compatible with the present political and social system but very likely to be attained only by utilizing that system's intrinsic possibilities. The second position supposes that bureaucratic organization is not a simple instrumentality but an agency of domination, that priorities cannot be altered in a system which functions so as to obscure but invariably to maintain certain kinds of domination, and that a newer and freer human culture can be created only if an entire system of social constraints were to be removed. In brief, it is a position of social criticism so profound as to generate a revolutionary politics. But what revolutionary agency can intellectuals find, other than themselves?

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The first position constitutes, of course, an affirmation of the present position and functions of the technical intelligentsia and the elites which direct it. It is, therefore, a rationalization of the social importance of that intelligentsia, and as such neatly calculated (consciously or not) to allow a political union of the intellectuals and that segment of the public (considerable because more than nominally literate) comprised by the intelligentsia. Those intellectuals who, by contrast, have developed a structural rather than a pragmatic critique of industrial society at first glance appear to have isolated themselves from the technical intelligentsia. The intelligentsia, educated (or rather, trained) and rewarded for tasks within the system, generally have been extremely resistant to critiques of the system — except, of course, insofar as the criticisms have demanded a more ample role and larger rewards for them. A critique which questions the rationality of the whole, which, specifically, questions the present system of access to privileges and rewards, has generally struck the intelligentsia as an expression of the self-pity of those whose culture was unadapted to the implacable demands of new social and intellectual forces. The intelligentsia admired the intellectuals for their virtuosity in the realm of culture, derived such entertainment and enlightenment as they could from their work, but disdained their social criticism. But as the intelligentsia has increased in size and importance, it has in some respects become more receptive to criticism. Its social position assured, it, or rather, some of its members, have begun to ask whether it is not entitled to a far greater share of control of the technical operations in which it is skilled.

This would imply, of course, a direct assault on the powers of the governing elites. The pressures upon the technical intelligentsia derive from two very distinct sources. The one is the conviction, basically occupational, that they can do at least as well as those placed above them in their present organizations. The other is the feeling that in their public and private lives, they are constantly encountering obstacles resulting from the incompetence of the elite. The students, free of occupational involvement and the servitudes it brings, have been free to voice these views with unmatched clarity and force. But while critical intellectuals have hitherto looked to the students as allies, as agents of possible revolutionary changes in a world full of reformist rhetoric but conservative intentions — in viewing the students in this way, they have emphasized the generational nature of the movement.

Suppose, however, that the movement were in effect an anticipatory strike by the technical labor force of tomorrow? Much vitiates this hypothesis: the concentration of the student revolt in disciplines of a nontechnical kind, the disinclination of the students involved to embark upon technical and bureaucratic careers of an ordinary sort and the

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corresponding improbability that many of them will ever join the technical labor force, the small or uncertain support for the revolt among the technical intelligentsia. Nevertheless, it is an hypothesis which offers some hope that the critical intellectuals can transcend the limits (however imprecisely or loosely drawn) of their own situation to make contact with a group of very considerable political potential. It is, further, an hypothesis which is lent some plausibility by the events of May in France, during which the technical labor force often participated in a direct onslaught on authority, and during which it not only formulated demands and projects for "auto-gestion" but proceeded in the rush of events to put these into effect. Finally, the trend to unionization in the technical labor force in the United States (in the public sector, to begin with) may point in the same ultimate direction.

V. The New Political Avant-Garde

One of the ways the intellectual avant-garde affects the technical intelligentsia is through the medium of art, and art is, if only implicitly, a critique of experience. The turning upon itself of modern culture in the forms of the new visual art, the utilization of the detritus of daily experience to mock that experience, constitutes a mode of social criticism. Pop art, it is true, does not go beyond the surface of the visual and tactile experience of an industrial (and a commercialized) culture. Dwelling on the surface, it allows its consumers to mock the elements of their daily life, without abandoning it. Indeed, the consumption of art in the organized market for leisure serves at times to encapsulate the social criticism of the avant-garde. However, the recent engagement of writers, artists and theater people in contemporary issues suggests that this sort of containment may have begun to reach its limits.

In an atmosphere in which the intellectually dominant group insists on the contradictions inherent in daily experience, the technical intelligentsia will find it difficult to remain unconscious of those contradictions. The technical intelligentsia have until now avoided contradictions by accepting large rewards for their expertise. As expertise becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish from ordinary service on the one hand, and merges on the other with the change of the social environment, the technical intelligentsia's psychic security may be jeopardized. Rendering of labor services casts it back into spiritual proletarianization; a challenge to the social control exercised by elites, who use the technical intelligentsia's labor power, pushes it forward to social criticism and revolutionary politics. That these are matters, for the moment, of primarily spiritual import does not diminish their ultimate political significance. A

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psychological precondition for radical action is usually far more important than an "objectively" revolutionary situation — whatever that may be.

The chances for a radicalization of the technical intelligentsia, thus extending the student revolt, cannot be even approximated. I believe I have shown there is a chance. Two final questions remain to be discussed. The first concerns the avant-garde role of the manual working class itself. Is it so totally exhausted? Periodicities in the conflict of social classes, phenomena like the bureaucratic regulation of that conflict by the trade unions, ought not to overshadow the continuing existence of deep and divisive conflicts of class interest in industrial societies. A radicalized technical intelligentsia in the labor force, itself in touch with the intellectuals outside it, may well provide an historical successor to the nineteenth-century labor aristocracy.

It may be argued, of course, that the labor aristocracy had the function of leading the unions and the socialist movement into class collaboration. Yet even if the technical intelligentsia in the past have been class collaborators, things can't become any worse in this respect. Besides, history does not repeat itself, and the technical intelligentsia — in alliance with a working class itself exceedingly technicized — may turn out to be a new radical force. It is also likely that with expanding educational facilities, the new technical intelligentsia will be recruited increasingly from the workers much more than from the intellectuals. The entry of the technical intelligentsia into the union movement may contribute to the unions' re-radicalization. (The evidence from France points in this direction.) At any rate, barring a rapidly developing economic crisis, the working class as such seems unlikely to play the role of an avant-garde. Its very integration in bureaucratic society may, however, predispose it to respond to avant-garde groups similarly integrated — particularly if these groups are in daily contact with the working class and involved in routines comprehensible to it.

In short, the technical intelligentsia may serve as a cultural and political link between the working class and the intellectuals. Recently, the working class has been indifferent, often hostile to the cultural revolution. The student movement on the other hand, believes that its revolt is part of a process of liberation from a culture become ossified, authoritarian and inhuman. The psychological effects of their activity, then, seem as important to many students as political ones. There seems to be no immediate prospect of this kind of liberation spreading to other social groups. However, the sharing of a sector of mass culture (one in which the cultural consumers, for once, do affect what is offered on the market) by younger workers and students may again point in the direction of a more open future.

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The students, in their cultural experimentation, have sought to establish a concrete utopia. They have refused to wait for the future, for those hypothetical social changes enabling them ultimately to live a new life. It is very likely that their belief that the new life can be lived, permanently, on the margin or in the interstices of industrial society will prove illusory. Politically, it may prove even worse than that, particularly if it is true: the establishment of libertarian colonies supported by the rest of a bureaucratic society may guarantee an indefinite continuation of bureaucratic rule, by diverting from politics some of the most imaginative and energetic of the young. But for the moment, no such difficulty confronts us: cultural and political radicalism are related. Their close relationship is not always positive: some of the radicals cannot distinguish, particularly in America, between transcending the reactionary elements in culture and the total destruction of cultural tradition.

Ultimately, the central function of cultural radicalism may be to demonstrate to those caught in one routine that other routines are possible. It is, however, too much to expect that the entire technical intelligentsia will come to radical politics by passing through a phase of hippydom. Rather, the intelligentsia may come to radical politics by generalizing its occupational dissatisfactions into a larger dissatisfaction with society. Part of that dissatisfaction must inevitably turn on the cultural and psychological restrictions it accepts as the price it must pay for its status. The students have moved from the view that their lives are wrong to the view that society as a whole is wrong. The intelligentsia can afford no immediate change of life; its members will have to move from a general critique of society to the recognition that their lives are defective, and this process may well begin with their occupational discontents. The many interconnections and interpenetrating spheres of industrial society may help to speed up the process once it does begin.

For the moment, the avant-garde role of the students and the intellectuals may well reside in their capacity to provide moral leadership for the technical intelligentsia. Without an extension of the present movement beyond its narrow base, avant-gardism may turn out to be inspired sectarianism. But the analysis of modern society promulgated by the new left and the student movement worked at by critical intellectuals for the past two decades, is too profound, too just, a vision of reality to merit this fate. Hence the effort to convince other groups of its truth must be the main task of the avant-garde in the next period. In this sense, the avant-garde cannot be understood as leading a movement, but as constructing one.

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FIVE POEMS by Herbert Krohn

CAN THO

Can Tho, favela of crowing cocks
Favela of my dreams
Can Tho's tin rooftops conduct the rains
To Can Tho's muddy streams
Her swallows turn and veer in the sun
And sing in whistles and screams.

I love the gentle people of this city
Fragile as birdsong, flexible as rice
Yet birds can awaken armies, and rice can sing in the wind.
I love this race of farmers and musicians
With a love that no more needs reciprocation
Than my love for bread and songs.

American soldiers,
The cocks of Can Tho crowed when you arrived here
Like Can Tho's women cooing
"No sweat, I love you too much"
When first you meet.
American soldiers,
The cocks who crow at morning and at evening
Will crow triumphantly at your departure
Like Can Tho's women nursing
Fatherless children whom you never knew.

Can Tho, Viet Nam 1966

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ANCESTOR SONG FOR GRANDPA

I

Horrible journey
From haunted empty corridors of childhood
To open places in the sun at noon
Swimming with your image between my teeth
Drinking it in the new Mexican desert
I am buoyant on the Mekong River
I am sane in Bellevue
For you are always with me like my eyes
For you are always with me like my knife.

II

Mendel was one of the bewitched
A sad eyed greenhorn alchemist
Transmuting diamonds and his education
Into the final jobs in luncheonettes.
Mendel Berlinger knew seven languages
(A cunning linguist, according to grandma)
Yet he came to this country and tasted an orange
And he found it bitter and tough.

III

But where have you gone to?
Your hair is harpstrings and your shins are flutes
I am the one survivor of your groins
And when you died your soul gave life to forty-seven blackbirds
One for every year you suffered.
I saw them rise and go on your last morning
And knew the singing things you had become.

IV

I should have eaten your flesh on the day when you died
You should not pass to nothing.
When they came to the home to tell me you had died
I should have eaten your flesh.
Before your brain and eyes had turned to insects
Before the rain had washed you away to the river
I should have eaten your flesh to keep you alive.

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V

Dear grandpa, it's autumn now in New York City
I've been to China and back
Probably killed and probably fathered
(No one knows things for certain anymore).
What else is new?
Well, the old neighborhood is changing.
Sounds of Negro street musicians
Sounds of latin drummers
Rise to my window.
What do they know of birth and death in exile
Exultation at the start of a journey
And then the loneliness in foreign cities?
I think about you most when I'm at sea, grandpa.
There, certain things remind me of you
Like desperate seabirds far from shore
And stars long dead by which we navigate.

THE SURGEON'S SONG (The Rain in Indochina)

In Indochina in the raining season
You are in a jungle dressing station
Your tears are not without reason
But are thought to be perspiration
As you cry for the flesh that is severed
And you cry for the flesh that remains.
Now it is April, despite the killing,
So you whistle a song about the rain
Which was the lullaby of April sleep
"A friend of lovers, it can always keep
The secret of their meeting with its pitter pat . . ."
Her eyes were rain colored
When you said goodbye
But now in Indochina
Where the rains are made
And lovers are wounded
You work at your trade.

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LETTER AND CONVERSATION

Do you have my wife?
How long you stay Saigon?
Maybe ti-ti
Maybe beaucoup.
I like you too much.
And I no say I love you too much!
Next time you come to *New York Bar*
I love you too much.
Maybe now you buy me Saigon tea?

My darling,
Yesterday evening it was too hot,
I called the wind.
Then, ti-ti, I fall asleep.
Maybe midnight,
Maybe midnight I wake up
I write to you this letter
By many small candle
Then I cry many sweat.
You see where they fall on my letter?
Maybe after one year you go back states
No sweat.
Maybe V.C. fini you
I very sad.

Saigon 1967

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THE NEW YORK DAILY BLUES

Eight in the morning and the bridges of New York are taking flame
Five in the evening and they're glowing again
While every window facing west
In this city I love best
Burns, burns, burns in the changing light.

"The West is mine, the West is mine" cries the dying sun
"The East is mine, the East is mine" cries the infant moon
While every window facing west
In this city I love best
Burns, burns, burns in the dying light.

You are the city where I knew you, you are the city
You are the streets where we walked
But only the shadows of five in the evening now climb the stairs to your room
And the windows of the house you lived in laugh with tongues of curtain at the wind
And the rooftops of the house you lived in weep whenever it rains.
You are the house you lived in and the city where we met.

It wasn't night
It wasn't day
It was a fog that fell from heaven and the world was all grey
I had the New York daily blues
When the sun died as a child
Had those New York daily blues
And my thoughts were all wild.

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John Hollander

IN THE CREEP BLOCK, ONE WAS OBSERVED...

There was no doubt about it. I personally thought that it was the clock that was rigged, but the majority view held for one of the skylights in the ceiling, and groups of men huddled together under the blank panels between the areas of leaded glass overhead as if to get out of a downpour. Particularly when anything peculiar was going on, on which occasions I would usually sit down on the floor, with my back against the wall, whistling all the verses of something and tapping on the floorboards. Sometimes I thought that it was the noise of the tapping that had landed me there in the first place. The other tapping, I mean; but looking back on it, it was probably the white cane that got me arrested.

The more authentic aluminum one (I had bought it weeks before at one of the five Truss and Surgical Supplies in the neighborhood) I had left in a cab on the previous day. The mirror sewn into the peak of my cap had shown such an engrossing sight in the front seat that I had completely forgotten the cane. Beside the driver were an oak barometer, lying on the seat, a ball of twine and what looked to be an odd volume of Pope's Homer. I was dividing my attention between holding my head at the proper angle and rolling my eyes up right, apparently unseeingly (I'd had to take off my smoked glasses in the cool darkness of the cab), and actually trying to puzzle out what the driver's little kit could possibly be *for*. By the time the cabby said "OK, Sixth and Alvarado," I could only push a bill at him, await his scrupulous return of change, go through all the jazz about pretending to feel out its denominations, and finally plunge across the hot expanse of sidewalk into the musical interior of QUIMBY'S A CLEAN PLACE TO EAT. Only halfway through my Quimburger and Thick

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Frappe did I remember the cane. But by then it would have been risky as well as too late to do anything about it.

But the next day I wanted to go out again. I got an old cane with a crook from the Salvation Army, carefully painted it white, made a broad band of red six inches up at the bottom, and out of some raffish impulse added two red rings on the handle. Then I laid out all my regalia: cane, heavy dark glasses, an old and ulcerous white enameled cup, and the sign that hung around my neck. On dirty yellow cardboard, lettered in labored Gothic script was the announcement "BLIND, BUT VERY MERRY." Fully turned out, I was free to work any well-crowded street with my most penetrating stare.

For a full, fixed, frank gaze is the moral equivalent, in public, of the private glance that steals visions through keyholes. In any open crowd of strangers, a certain kind of candid but relaxed staring is the most ill-advised of acts. It must be camouflaged to be effective. Walking, waiting, milling, hurrying or dawdling citizens meet your open gaze with various reactions; but the blushes, the raging, the sudden twitch of terror or sneer of resentment have in common one thing. They are the same signs of inner disturbance that the recipient of your stare might evidence when, sealed in his bright, tiled bathroom, fresh from the indulgence of some private and idiosyncratic little ritual, the medicine chest were to fly open, and a face (yours, or Harpo Marx's, for instance) were to appear through a sliding panel in its back, wearing a bland look of studious concentration. Even at best, the citizen would turn away and then you would have to work up the stare all over again. Ronnie Gocart, who in my late childhood would share with me two blocks of homeward walk after school, used to advise me with confidential seriousness: "Always look 'em right in the snatch and then they can't turn away." I remember taking the advice very seriously, but it was some years before I realized that the young ladies in question probably thought, if anything, that I was staring at the ground as I trudged sloppily along. I mention this now only as an object lesson: here intention was thwarted; that it was successfully disguised was insufficient consolation, that they didn't turn away became unimportant.

But in Los Angeles I learned to see much through the mask of darkness. I never pretended to be blind in New York, for reasons that I still don't fully understand; but within a few weeks after I'd come

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West, the good weather would occasionally see me, like the eager subjects of the newspapers' inquiring photographers, in "various spots," tapping at long and aperiodic intervals, jingling the coins in my cup, studying faces and necks and shoes, among other things. And all this with no embarrassment or other harm. Was it for nothing that I had been reared in a real City, one of the very few, and that its priceless lessons had been taught me early? Glimpse: *Myself, fifteen, in high school. Running with a sweetly innocent cabal, reading coterie books but struggling for unnecessarily high marks and not getting laid at all at all. Listening to string quartets in the dark (it was better that way). Now we are at a Stadium concert: darkness is starting to curtain a not-long-since yellow sky. The opening measures of the Rachmaninoff* Paganini Variations *are greeted with scorn by those of us of more advanced views; the music dims under the sound of a passing plane. Enter, a porky thug of a since-exhausted vintage: Truman shirt, huaraches, little tummy pressing out against the pleats of mocha slacks (what was he doing there?), crossing us awkwardly to take his hard, stone seat. Some mutterings come from us; says thug: "You wan' I should rap your teeth down your throat?" (Please, may there be no real ugliness, here, now.) From us, nothing. He turns to another, a stranger on his left: "And yours, too, shithead?" Other: "What did I do? Why?" Openwork shoes (whose attribute I am eyeing now with more practical calm; they are like the openwork privates of an Etruscan, an Ajax' toe; I can stomp if it comes to anything)*: "BECAUSE YOU'RE LOOKING AT ME." *My silent riposte, "Indeed, who isn't?" is now unneeded; the whole tempo has changed. A Person has become a Scene, and it is all right to look. Huaraches has lost, and accepts the stares of the surrounding benches. They are no longer the penetrating public peeping that I am at this moment considering for the first time:* "Because you're *looking* at me," *the urban slight when administered under all but decreed occasions. Only at what are properly spectacles is it all right to look. A drunk shouts obscenities at a busdriver, a baby is smashed in a revolving door, a suicide on a ledge discovers that she really isn't one and dies by what is, in the last analysis, an accident. It's okay to look, lady. But don't look at me.*

Hence, in later years, my blindness, that I might better see. I don't want to traffic in paradox, if I can at all help it. But there it is: seeing is a funny thing at best. Whatshisname unscrews his 20-20

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eyes, after he knows what he couldn't possibly have known all along, and says: "Thanks, I can see better without them." "I see many things," croons the blind old Village Bore in the Bulgarian movie that one has been trapped by urging friends into seeing; she turns out to be the Oversoul after all. "A man of great public vision" reads part of the inscription on the statue of Mumble McMumble, but any child can see that his patined bronze pupils stare out sightlessly across Central Park, cataracted with bird droppings milder even than Tobit's. I make no apology for my own remark: seeing always seems to mean knowing.

I was blind, then, in order that I might better see. At any rate, there I was one day, starting out on the fringes of my own neighborhood, observing the set of many mouths and the pace of many gaits, cataloguing obscure blemishes (two ancient tracheotomy scars in five blocks, etc.). Just after successfully navigating a street corner (successfully for me, that is: my dangers are not those of the blind), I made a fatal blunder after all. A phony blindman with a peculiar nervous twitch, far less sure of himself than such minor grifters usually are, engaged my attention for a moment. Then suddenly a thing in plainclothes had emerged from behind smoked glasses and tin cup, clapped me on the shoulder, and thrust a crude but shiny badge under my eyes. I regret not having been able to see what must have been the magnificent moment when two owlish pairs of eyes atop two waggling, crane necks were attempting at once to assess each other and to remain apparently vacant.

"Okay, Flurch, I'm taking you in." His manner suddenly adjusted itself to his new legitimacy of appearance.

"My name isn't Flurch and I don't even think it's funny."

"No lip, now. You were on the flurch and I know it. I specialize in this sort of thing. Get a move on."

"But Officer," I began as we started moving, it seemed to me, more swiftly than we were actually doing, "I was merely engaged in my researches." A gentleman, I had been taught, treats everyone else as if he were also one; rationalists are not born, but rather create themselves; one must not always work at treating others as if they, too, had minds.

"Shove it, now. What do you think, I'm a mark too? And how much do you pull down? Come on, drag it up."

At this display of technical jargon, I could only show him the

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entire contents of my cup, which contained an English threepenny bit, tax tokens from various Southern cities, two slugs and a pierced amusement-park Lucky Piece, stamped with the incomplete message "TOM AND MATILDA SEE AL . . . ," my own collecteana, all. Never have I drawn a grivenik's profit, Officer, from my attentive wanderings.

"Are you shitting me? Where is it?"

"Search me!"

He did. "What is it with you people? The crumbiest little con that doesn't even cover unemployment maybe and you think you're Yellow Kid Weil." This man was full of the lore of his specialty. I had by now concluded that "flurching" involved feigned blindness for the coin of it. And I remained resolute.

"Officer, I've done nothing wrong—I haven't really begged at all, and I've bothered no one. I'm too old to be part of some initiation prank and I don't feel like lying about what I'm doing, anyway. I was merely studying the passing parade, you might say. I pretend to be blind so that nobody I stare at will be offended or overly uncomfortable. I—"

"Okay, Flurch. I've had it. Let's go."

But I hardly needed this injunction, for we were by then involved in an adroit series of calisthenics and mutterings, ending up handcuffed together, while headquarters was telephoned. In a very few minutes a car had arrived and we were being finessed through traffic to some sort of district station. The matter of booking me required quite a bit of huddled consultation between the bunco cop, as I later learned that he was called, and a detective sergeant. I surrendered my paraphernalia, coin collection, wallet, money, keys, belt and shoelaces and started to protest again. This time, the sergeant listened me out.

"Who is this guy?" he asked my captor.

"I don't know for sure yet. I'll research it later. Wandering Grew is still in Quentin and all his friends have left town. This one's got a new story and a nutty line, but I'll crack it yet. My files—"

"Check his prints!"

"Ah, why can't I do it my way? In a couple of hours, I'll trace these coded bands on his cane here right back to the source. This guy looks to be of the old Saratoga Sam school, which means he must have grown up in, or at least spent a good while in Baltimore. Christ, it's written all over him, the—"

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"Forget it. If he thinks he's so special, and if you think he's so great, put him in the creep block. We've got no time to waste on all your fancy postgraduate work. But we'll book him on a vag tonight. You'd just better have something tighter than all this in the morning."

The sergeant was comforting, if not refreshing; he sounded exactly like one of his calling who had served manfully on a radio program that, as a child, I had dutifully listened to at 5:45 every afternoon. He turned to another officer: "How much did he have on him?"

"Okay for vag."

"Well, let him take a load off his feet until tomorrow." (See? The man might have been reading from a script.)

"But Sergeant Felsenkopf," began the expert again, "I can really trace him in an hour or so. This is an age of specialization you know. Your old, brutal police methods aren't going to work with what I like to call, uh, the modern criminal. He— Look here," he broke off, turning to me again. "Here, you, read this sentence on this card out in a normal way not changing your normal way of speaking in any way." All this was said very mechanically, as, seemingly from nowhere, he produced a rather soiled card. I held it before me and stared at the union printers' label at the bottom, letting my eyes go out of focus in the glare of the white, overhead light.

"Come on, now!"

I began to read in a normal way: "Merry Mary got married to a lawyer with wens on his forehead that he kept purple with an ointment of tin and an analgesic balm prepared by a—"

"My sweet Christ!" This was Felsenkopf in mingled displeasure and disbelief.

"But sergeant, it's only my dialect test. I want to find out where he—"

Felsenkopf held up his hand gently and winced. I suppose that I giggled. He called out to two loitering figures across the wide room: "Take this, uh, Kooker here and put him on creep block for tonight."

The creep block was not really a cell block at all, although it may once have been one. It was a long, high, brightly-lit room, lined on three sides with newish, shiny green tiles that ran up to a ceiling that looked, in the glow of the fluorescent lights that outlined the skylight panels, to be mauve in color. The fourth side ended in an

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unusually complicated wrought-iron framework in which was set a perfectly ordinary barred door. It was a little too low, one realized on being pushed through it. The lights were recessed in the ceiling and covered over with a heavy grille, as in a gymnasium, and a large clock set high in the wall opposite the door was covered in the same way. Around the sides of the room were wooden benches, not so narrow as to be really uncomfortable, but tipped, I soon learned, at such an angle to the wall that the eventual impulse was to get up and run toward the center of the room. A rather soft, dark-brown asphalt-like material gave the floor an illusion of yielding, yet without any real resiliency. In many ways it was a very nasty room in which to plunge some twenty or so nondescript males, the immersion accompanied in each case with a clanging reminder, as the door swung shut, that much as it resembled a junior high school gym, this was really a jail.

I picked my way across the floor. Standing and squatting shapes lounged about among a few prostrate ones; I made for one wall and tried out an empty section of bench. Without quite realizing why, I got up after a few seconds and walked toward the wall opposite the door. A faint drone of echoing conversation drilled through the room, obscured from time to time by the amplified shuffle of feet, the brushing noise of bunched clothes dragging across the floor, an occasional cry or groan. A burst of frenetic whistling emanated every so often from a short, nervous one with absolutely no hair. Of the more than thirty men in the room, he seemed to be the only one with any obvious physical defect, although most looked, in some way or another, to be ailing. The tune that he whistled, so rapidly and so high that it could hardly be made out, was the first strain of "Take me out to the ball game."

Spalding, or so the other men called him, had little to say. I remember him for his near-idiocy and for the constant intrusion of his whistling. He was the only man I cared to single out for any attention at all. I had no wish, you must see, to come to terms with the place at all, particularly since I should be out of it tomorrow, none the worse for the boredom. The other men's shapes remained shapes only as I kept focusing my eyes on the dreadful green tiles of the walls. Finally, I sat down on the floor, stretched myself out on one side, curled my arms about my head, and half shut my eyes while I indulged in the minor restorative of watching a man standing

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nearby make a furious run at pocketpool with his right hand probably reaching down through a good-sized hole, while with his left he made elaborate gestures to accompany his conversation with another man, both hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet.

"Surely," I told myself in the manner of narrators of ghost stories, "I'll be out of here in the morning." And, tired by the utter uninterestingness of the whole business, I fell asleep. It was a few hours later that I snapped awake. Whether it was the new noises and unaccustomed order that followed the distribution of the box lunches, or whether it was in fact the sudden realization that I probably wouldn't be out of there tomorrow at all, I don't know. I had been having a dream in which Jiggs Bannon came and bailed me out with crisp, new fifty-dollar bills, carefully licking his right index finger under his long upper lip to count them out. His hat was on and he was looking very solemn, and his advanced age alone seemed faintly reproving. I was saying to him, almost as I awoke, "I'm sorry I had to call you so early in the day, Jiggs. I know you like to keep night hours." And then I was glumly realizing that I hadn't called anybody, Jiggs or some lawyer or even Mr. Vel at the hotel desk; that nobody knew where I was; and that the police hadn't booked me on a vagrancy charge but had put me into a kind of legal limbo. When Jiggs finally did come for me, three days later, by the way, there wasn't the least bit of reproof. Only regret did he voice about having to wait another day for an amenable bondsman; it was only then that I discovered that, with great wit, Sergeant Felsenkopf had booked me on a Peeping Tom charge. My only one.

Maybe it was only the noise of the lunch distribution that woke me up. But here I was, strained and aching, wondering how long I'd be there, watching two guards depositing a little pile of cardboard boxes on some of the unoccupied benches. Then they withdrew, allowing hungry, bored and crazy men to approach the pile in various ways. Graduate students in various subjects, meanwhile, glanced at watches and took scrupulous notes in their little dugout overhead, peering down through the one-way glass of the artificial skylights. I ambled over, committed now to life as it seemed to be shaping up for a while, and selected one of the lunch packages. It contained the picnicky version of institutional slop: a bright orange-colored rubbery slab of plastic cheese between two pads of cotton batting, an

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unsucculent chip of grayish pickle, a boring apple and a container of milk. A small group had gathered near the lunch bench, eating grimly and staring with disdain at the vocal gripers.

"Yummers!"

"You could eat better in any shiddy liddle coun'y can."

"If you don't want it, could I . . . ."

I joined the little community, grateful for their silence. Everyone seemed to be sharing the effort of chewing; all five men were the other side of fifty and dressed pretty much alike, in faded and stained suntans and fairly clean white shirts, open at the neck. But that, and what struck me as the salutary tone of their morale, was all they seemed to have in common. Maybe it was only for me, or maybe only, because of what happened, for me now, that Hagestolz dominated the group. He was certainly bigger, older, sadder-eyed and more heavily bearded than any of the others; he alone wore his shirt sleeves unrolled, the cuffs neatly buttoned. And awkward, stooping a little, he was the last to speak.

"You new here?" He barely seemed to have looked me over.

"Yes. I came in today."

"Then move over toward the other corner after you put your lunch tray back. You're being studied." He said this with a kind of nonchalance that puzzled me. I had heard of the tight politico-sexual organizations inside prisons, and was a little chilled by what looked like their lack of ceremony. But I decided to be innocent.

"Who by?" I inquired, inquiringly.

"What say?" said Hagestolz, who had turned to a muttered conversation with the others.

"Who am I being studied by?"

"Psychology students from UCLA. Those skylights are one-way glass." This was before the days of closed-circuit television.

"Why?"

"Modern police methods" — Hagestolz started imitating the tone of the scholarly cop who had arrested me. The others sniggered. He gave them a look of disgust and resumed his own manner. "They keep bringing Spalding back in for a few days every month so a new batch of students can hear him whistle. They don't even bother to cook up a charge any more. Just 'habitual offender.' What are you in for?"

I considered this; after all, I was in the creep block. "I got caught watching my landlord giving it to the girl who lives upstairs

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from me. I had a periscope rigged from my own window, so I could watch her room without getting out onto the fire escape. Well, the landlord, a little guy with glasses, came in to fix the back burner. On her stove; but I know they've been doing it for weeks, so I sent up my periscope and I saw him come in and take off his coat and they start to fool around and they get onto the bed and bang! the lights go off. But there's a streetlight shining in, and I think I can make out a few things, and suddenly it gets brighter and I can see her face while she's lying there, as clear as anything, with her eyes shut and mouth working around. It's almost as if there's a spotlight on them. And then I found out that there was, a spotlight I mean, and on me, too, and a couple of cops had come up the fire escape and seen me and I got pinched."

"First offense?" One of the men standing next to Hagestolz was clearly not impressed.

"Yes. They pull in a lot of guys for this?"

"All the time. That's why they set up this place, like for observation. They keep you here until you're bailed out. Half these guys are in here for Peepin' Tom. Then they peep at them. Pretty good, huh?" We had been ambling down the long side of the room, and stopped to sit, away from the others, on one of the benches for a few moments.

I asked, "What's Hagestolz here for?"

"That's different. Him and me are trusty. We're up five years for a con, but the psychologists had us sent here from upstate to sort of be constant factors they call it. We get interviewed about all you guys twice a week. It's better than one of the goddam minimum-security boyscout camps and we get a better shot at parole. But you guys aren't for real."

"What do you mean?"

"In, out. Then get it hushed up by your family. There was a guy here, head of the school board someplace, got caught in a tree with a pair of eight-by-fifty glasses looking in a window of a girls' dormitory at the college. In two days, then somebody fixes it, and there's nothing on the blotter even. Or bigger guys than that; they got Vontzel Gold in here once on the nuttiest deal in the world. Even the tax guys can't get him, but he had this weird piece of gash, Elaine, and he was laying out all kinds of fancy money for the bug doctor for her; she can't stand being alone, she says, she can't stand it when she just ain't."

"Just ain't what?"

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"Like not there for real. 'I mean I don't exist,' she always was saying, 'unless some guy's looking at me, unless I can feel him looking at me, then I can feel like I'm here.' I don't get it, and the Vontz never got it, but he was stuck on her and stuck *with* her, you know what I mean, and one night they're in bed and Vontzel is sleepy, but she's awake and gets the heebie-jeebies. But he won't look at her. So she goes to the window and pulls up her nightie and sits out on the ledge and lets the streetlight shine on her quiff so you could see it from a block away. Vontzel gets screaming mad and yells at her to get back, like anyone can see her. But that's what she wants, she says, she wants to be *there*. So Vontz knows what he's putting up with and gets foxy and says she should come back to bed, nobody can see her there, he can't even. So she turns and gives him a crazy eye and says 'God sees, you pig, God sees.' He gets even madder, and starts yelling even louder, and he's just about to give her a clop in the chops when the cops walk in. And that nutty Elaine starts coming over all sweet and pulls her skirt down and tells them it was Vontzel made her do it, that he can't raise one unless he can see somebody looking at *her,* like from across the street. So off they carted him to the creep block. Vontzel was wild; they kept him here three days before they fixed it up downtown."

"What happened to Elaine?"

"Yeah, so they'll probably let you out on bail in a day or two, and then your folks can fix you up. Look, I gotta go now, Sonny, I have to report to the psychologists. If you got any questions, ask Hagestolz." So saying, my nameless informant sauntered down to the door of the room, where a uniformed shape awaited him with a bored look barely discernible, in that awful glare of overhead lighting, on its face. I was left alone for the moment, and although Hagestolz looked to be a man of knowledge and power, I decided to remain where I was and devote myself to the business of being watched. Except for that one picture that Virgilia took of me long ago, and that I only discovered some years later, I cannot recall being aware of being spied upon myself. That knowledge didn't bother me in the least, and I was only perplexed about how to go about dutifully being an event. An event in my sense, of course; a piece of reality, just happening, unprepared by frame or arrangement or selection for the eye of a beholder. It became, suddenly, very difficult to do anything at all. I wandered about until I found a place on one of the benches that seemed to be at a good visual angle from one of the spy-holes: I had

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no desire to be unduly foreshortened, or to look too imaginatively grotesque by reason of some brute trick of perspective. So. There was a good chance that what would be seen would be really me. There is always a problem about what visual version of one is really oneself; Matilda used to tell me of the time, the only time, she herself ever sat for a portrait.

It had been when she was still in art school in Boston, and a fellow-student who wanted to be a society portraitist and who thought she looked like a Sargent did her painstakingly in oils. "After we'd agreed on the pose, a sort of a three-quarter-view, I-am-more-subtle-than-my-more-beautiful-frothy-sisters thing," she told me once, "I began to feel as if the part of my face he was looking at, trying to get *right,* was gradually roughening up. In texture. It felt like a piece of concrete block, but from *inside* the face, not as if I'd rubbed my hand over it. Then it began to swell up, and go ballooning out toward him, across the room. But he didn't seem to notice." Matilda always thought that this sort of thing had to do with why people shy away from their own profiles, whenever they see one that's been decently drawn.

In any event, I just wanted everything to be nice, as far as my watchers were concerned. I started groping for routines, but they all became, under the silly lights, somehow implausible. What to do? What to do? This could, I realized, lead to panic, and I was already starting to sweat at the roots of my hairline. I considered picking my nose systematically, going at it like a miner, assembling one of those considerable nuggets which, with a half-hour's admixture of dust gets to be like old plasticine, and surreptitiously (ha ha!) depositing it somewhere, such as under the wooden lip of one of the benches. But it hardly seemed worth the effort. I got more and more uneasy, knowing all the time that it was an uneasiness that came from being free of the usual burgherly cares about being seen. I have often made love by an open window, letting the sound of crickets or sirens wash over me and mine in waves, feeling the scratches of dropped milk-bottles on a neighboring stoop against my back. And all this with perhaps a shaded lamp, filling the room with soft light. All right, so look. Some girls are nervous, though, but I think that this has little to do with what Others might see. But in general, pulling shades down has nothing to do with ensuring privacy. It's a kind of orderly tic.

Here I was, though, unable to do right by my observers. All around the huge room, the other prisoners were being garrulous,

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creepy, sullen or demented, but *being* so, *out there,* not imprisoned, like me, inside what seemed to be a huge papier-mâché head. But not papier-mâché; mind, rather, a confining chamber made out of what I know, what I know I don't know, and what I know can be known. I must have sat there, fretting and stewing, for hours. Being "under observation," most safe selves feel, is a little like being, say, "beneath contempt." I began to feel that it was more like being under water. Standing under some pious idiot's gaze, *under-standing* the whole thing at the same time, not being possessed of the comfy narcissism of an actor or a singer, I felt completely helpless.

In the end, it was easiest to surrender to the whole idea of the creep block. After a few hours, I became a creep, studiously and lightheartedly imitating the behavior of those about me. For a while I outdid even Spalding in scratching at my crotch and whistling "Have you seen the muffin man?" Then I put my head in my hands and fled from the *thingness* of everything. Then I discussed current events with an aging urchin who had been picked up for soliciting outside an orthodox synagogue, and was therefore deemed worthy of observation. And so the afternoon passed merrily. I hardly noticed supper when it arrived (more tidy slop, I presume) and even forgot to be grateful when, at about seven-thirty, we were led out of the big room into what I gathered were perfectly ordinary cells. I was fortunate in having a private one, several prisoners having been transferred just that evening to other institutions. It was easy to stop being a creep, and to start wondering how I was ever to get out of the clutches of the Los Angeles police. But I also realized that after a few more days of this, de-creeping would get harder and harder. "Institutions," mental, penal, religious all work wonderfully well in urging people inside them to become each other. They have only to look about them and learn, but in no sense that I would want generally to accept. As I lay down to sleep I was comforted by knowing that crises like this one, which can distract one from the true path, causing one to construct all sorts of implausible views of the way things go in order to keep reasonably comfortable, don't happen every day. If they did, peeping at things would be impossible, for there would be no rich, quiet, eager darkness to peep *out of,* no dark, insatiable mind to fill with glimpses, patches of phenomena, stabs of the light of a true outside that nourishes and sustains.

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Leslie Epstein

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR: RITUAL IN THE MODERN THEATER

The theater is ablaze. Butterflies are incinerated and dollar bills are burned alive; tiny executions true, but not altogether removed in spirit from ancestral *autos-da-fé* and close enough in substance to Artaud's theater of cruelty for us to make out clearly what his "victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames" convey: weariness with illusion, disgust for art. The actors in *US*, and perhaps those in *Paradise Now* as well, had no such idea in mind when they set the insects' wings, the currency, afire. Whatever their intentions, it is not possible to accept their behavior as ordinary stage business, that is, as symbolic action involving the destruction of Vietnamese peasants and the capitalist system. Something about the butterfly and the dollar bill — it must be the sacredness of life that invests the former, the sacredness of power that inhabits the latter — makes it unthinkable for them to stand for anything other than themselves. They are not props. Hence the incendiaries are not actors and what they perform is not an illusion or an imitation; they are rather participants in what Artaud calls "a wholly magical action," a ritual designed not to evoke an emotion or effect a state of mind or — in Aristotle's phrase — lighten and delight the soul, but to transform the very being of all those present by uniting them one with another, with the dark side of their own natures and with the even darker powers of the earth. That these two burnings are ludicrously inadequate to this task is not so important as what they signify for an artistic tradition which has always sought to substitute illusion for action. "Psychology," Artaud wrote, "which works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known, to the quotidian and the ordinary, is the cause of the theater's abasement and its fearful loss of energy." It is precisely this "psychology" — these emotions and thoughts, images and ideas, words finally, and unburdened souls — which once sprang easily between desire and fulfillment, but which now seems artificially imposed and so unable to mediate between them. Who can deny the theater's fearful loss of energy? For the artist and his audience

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the talent for sublimation is exhausted. We should be grateful, perhaps, for the generation's respite between what the madman felt and what we acknowledge to be true.

The cult and ceremonies of Dionysus, in which the drama was conceived, and whose paternity may be perceived in the burnt swallow-tail, the founding father in a puff of smoke, were not ludicrous, nor did they suffer any lethargy. Here is Erwin Rohde's description of such a rite:

> The festival was held on the mountain tops in the darkness of night amid the flickering and uncertain light of torches. The loud and troubled sound of music was heard; the clash of bronze cymbals; the dull thunderous roar of kettledrums; and through them all penetrated the "maddening unison" of the deep-toned flute. . . . Excited by this wild music, the chorus of worshippers dance with shrill crying and jubilation. . . . These dances were something very different from the measured movement of the dance-step in which Homer's Greeks advanced and turned about in the *Paian*. It was in frantic, whirling, headlong eddies and dance-circles that these inspired companies danced over the mountain slopes. They were mostly women who whirled round in these circular dances till the point of exhaustion was reached; they were strangely dressed; they wore *bassarai,* long flowing garments, as it seems, stitched together of foxskins; over these were doeskins, and they even had horns fixed to their heads. Their hair was allowed to float in the wind; they carried snakes sacred to Sabazios in their hands and brandished daggers or else thyrsos-wands, the spear-points of which were concealed in ivy-leaves. In this fashion they raged wildly until every sense was wrought to the highest pitch of excitement, and in the "sacred frenzy" they fell upon the beast selected as their victim and tore their captured prey limb from limb. Then with their teeth they seized the bleeding flesh and devoured it raw.

Psychology, the working of the mind, exists here only to be uprooted. This magical action is designed not to make the unknown known but to render whatever is apprehended by the intellect a mystery.

We have been congratulating ourselves ever since on going beyond all that — beyond not in the sense of abandonment but of attenuation, toning down, vicariousness. The Victorian argument that the drama was born from such festivities and has preserved more or less (more catchup that is, and less blood) intact their ritual form and content has so pervaded our scholarship that generations of school children, not to mention Francis Fergusson, have thought that tragedy has something to do with growing vegetables. That goat song evolved from goat feast, that scapegoat superceded sparagmos, and that ecstasy and act gave way to analysis, word, is no more in question than the fact that the small,

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silent altar off to the side and out of the way of the padded kings represents a polite bow in the direction of the god, horned and suffering, stuffed down the throat of his worshippers. Nor is there much doubt that the ancient dithyramb, when young, sang the praises of the slaughter. What *is* being challenged here is the idea that when a rite of communion became a ritual of catharsis, its nature and purpose could remain the same. Jane Harrison described the difference between productive and presentational rites as follows: "The Greeks would say, methectic [rather] than mimetic, the expression, the utterance, of a common nature participated in, rather than the imitation of alien characteristics." The purpose of all primitive communal rites, she points out, is to overcome whatever distinction exists between the human and nonhuman members of the group; they seek "to bridge the gulf that is just opening, to restore by communion that complete unity which is just becoming conscious of possible division."

It is in the light of this primitive belief in, and periodic affirmation of, consubtantiality that we must interpret not only the Maenads' revels but the contemporary theater. Dionysus is the god of forgetfulness. In *The Bacchae* Tiresias says that, filled with his "good gift, suffering mankind forgets its grief; from it comes sleep; with it oblivion of the troubles of the day." The intoxication, literal and symbolic, that overflows Dionysus' wineskin is what has given him the name of *lusion,* liberator: he brings ecstasy, one dances out of oneself, skips from the brain's jailhouse. Boundaries crumble with a wave of his wand: first the boundary between self and fellow man, so that the single corybante becomes a congregation; and then the very idea of boundaries itself, so that the distinction between self and other is obliterated and there is reestablished the mystical union of mind and world, thought and drifting cloud. The various elements of the ritual — the darkness, the sensuality, the drunkenness, the exhaustion of the dance, the blinking-out of consciousness, the sense of unity with each other and oneness with the forces erupting within — lead the participants inevitably to a feeling that Freud (elaborating a phrase of Romain Rolland) called oceanic, the dissolving of the separate ego into the surrounding world as a grain of salt combines with the sea. This condition he ascribed to the return of a primitive mechanism, omnipotence, the infant's inability to distinguish between his mouth and his mother's breast, grasping finger and object grasped, the wish as an abstract mental state and the concrete joy of the wish come true. So too, with a narcissism no less dazzling, the Bacchantes merge the enormous energies they possess with the powers of the earth that possess them. It is just this confusion between, on the one hand, being inhabited by great forces and, on the other, inhabiting

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them, being ravished and ravishing, that the participants seek to fix and confirm by devouring, all alive, bleating, the divinity. The last boundary to fall is that between sacred and profane, man and god.

It ought to be clear that the feeling of connectedness which underlays the Dionysian rites (and, for Freud, the activity of those other mystics: infants, madmen, people in love) — its assumption that man's way is nature's way, that body and mind, deserts and destiny, are in a final harmony — is antithetical to the spirit of tragedy. The world of the Maenads, like all primitives, is coherent and integral; nothing can crack it but the wedge of consciousness, which is why the rhythms of the dance are meant to blunt the waking mind. The world of tragedy is disjunctive and schismatic; its chief fear is of being swept by the oceanic tide, swamped by the unconscious, which is why it strives, as Artaud said, to make the unknown known. Where the dancers feel joy and exhaltation at the engagement of their passions, the members of an audience, confronted by their fantasies, experience only terror and apprehension. To shift the emphasis of Miss Harrison's formula slightly, the mimetic, as opposed to the methectic, seeks, if anything, to prove that the characteristics being imitated — killing a King at a distant crossroads, bedding a familiar Queen — *are* alien; just so the cathartic rite struggles to make what is for the communal ritual a dimly perceived distinction between man and nature, self and other, intellect and instinct, a chasm. In religious terms, the forces which the drama seeks to purge its audience of are no less sacred than those which the Dionysian rite wishes to incorporate into its participants. Equally holy, they are treated with equal awe. What distinguishes them is the dancers' faith that they are beneficent and propitious and the actors' belief that they are a defilement and a profanation. It is this division of essentially the same forces into pure and impure sacred, a distinction known to every religion, that has made the one ceremony a rite of consecration, the other a ritual of desacralization.

How this transformation of belief occurred is important to us here only insofar as it was a function of the contemporaneous shift in Greek society from matriarchy to patriarchy, group membership to individual citizenship, shame culture to guilt culture, totemism to Olympianism — in short, as it was a necessary consequence of civilized life. The degree to which a people have been socialized may be measured by the amount of *miasma* — guilt, anxiety, contamination — they feel. It is the index of the gap between wish and fulfillment, a kind of waste product of an efficient culture. On one level these impurities are deposited by the constant mental rehearsal of just those desires, incest, parricide, by whose interdiction society is maintained. Culture is based, then, primari-

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ly on the feeling men have of being accomplices in a crime and secondarily on the "creative sense of guilt" (Freud) that the wish to return to its scene engenders. On another, more metaphysical level, anxiety is manufactured not by one's desire to recapitulate the deeds of the ancient dead but simply by virtue of being a part of what Jaspers calls the conspiracy of the living. Because a man, no matter what he does, does not *do more* to end whatever evil exists in the world: he is responsible for it. The better the citizen, the worse the criminal. Since the Greeks were good citizens indeed, one should not wonder that they came to be haunted by what E. R. Dodds describes as a "universal fear of pollution (miasma), and its correlate, the universal craving for ritual purification (catharsis)." Obsessed by a sense of perilousness and division, profoundly distrustful, fifth-century Athens evolved a ceremonial life designed not to unite or reconcile its citizens with the antagonistic sacred forces in their midst, but to allow them to walk gingerly between the rock of the Acropolis and the fickle Furies, their goal reality, that mediocrity.

All of which is to say that the ritual purpose of tragedy is closer to Leviticus than Dionysus, to Aaron's goat, not the one representing the Thracian god:

> And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

Talmudic commentary has always assumed that the sins passed on to the scapegoat are those of Azazel, the demon of seduction, and the chapters of Leviticus that surround the description of purification deal with sexual pollution, specifically incest, homosexuality, bestiality and even the "seed of copulation" itself, which makes the garment it falls upon unclean until the evening on which it is washed. These iniquities were for the most part not acts of commission but belong to the category of what the Talmud calls sinning of the heart, dream transgressions. Indeed, by confessing these deeds, by uttering the forbidden words, the children of Israel put themselves in greater danger than when they restricted them to the pleasure ground of the imagination. But this is precisely how the homeopathic remedy of catharsis works. As Aristotle remarked, the tragedian arouses emotions only to purge them, creates a frenzy to effect a calm, weighs down the soul in order to lighten it. To Plato and to Heraclitus (who said that catharsis was like taking a bath by washing in mud), such a procedure was as absurd as

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to a contemporary audience it is useless. Yet the doctrine that what blackens whitens is the essence of desacralization. Only by generating the sacred, naming and miming the sin, can it be discharged.

What is from the point of view of Israel a desacralization, an exchange of mana for the mundane, is, from the goat's vantage point, a consecration, a shouldering of divinity. The goat comes to possess the sanctity of the group and so is a threat to it, a source of recontamination. It cannot be killed because it cannot be touched, and in any case its flesh and bones would infect the ground it fell upon. The only thing to do with this goat, holy, dangerous, criminal, is lead it, in all its dubious glory, away, into the wilderness where its mana can dissipate itself, run off harmlessly into the earth like electricity. So potent is its contamination that the "fit man" who takes it away must wash his clothes and bathe his flesh before returning to his people. Thus do men create gods so that they may remain nonentities.

Tragedy, then, contrary to everything the English anthropologists and the drama books have taught us, is not designed to renew energy but to insure its dissolution. A victim is consecrated that the group may be profane. The hero is chosen for a certain combination of loftiness and vulnerability, high station, perhaps, and insolence, which at one and the same time allows him to represent the group's virtues and vices, its social ideals and its inner rebelliousness. The establishment of the hero's position as emblem of his people (a coronation ceremony, a riddle solved) is equivalent to the laying on of hands in Leviticus. The hero's ability to contact and act out the sins of the heart, the repressed fantasies of the group, would of course be the declaration of iniquities. It is at this point that the hero is flooded with *menos,* sudden insight, a flash of inspiration, a superhuman power, and it is here that king and chorus, hero and audience, part company. The community of men fall away, their energy depleted, like a burned-out rocket; but the hero is ignited with the sanctity of the transgressor, the criminal. He is holy, not to be touched, not to be looked upon, fit for nothing but wilderness. There he wanders, less *daemon* (as Lionel Abel has called him — but the name suggests a divinity with personal control over and interest in the affairs of men, when it is the hero's impersonality and isolation that is crucial to his journey) than *Jinni,* one of those lonely Arabian gods, without worshippers, a perpetual stranger. The only community willing to accept him is the society of his ancestors, and at exile's end, untouchable still, he does not die by any man's hand but, like Oedipus, simply expires, used up, worn down, worn out, worn away, fading off in a blaze of borrowed passion.

Artaud's distinction between culture and art, a theater of cruelty,

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a drama of psychology, is precisely that between the Bacchae who followed Dionysus and *The Bacchae* by Euripides. From the former comes that "perpetual exultation" through submission to instinctual forces, from the latter a perpetual enervation through manipulation and rejection of that energy. But the difference between the ritual and the work of art is not limited to whether one eats the goat or expels it from one's midst. There is, to start, the remarkable phrase, "by Euripides." A myth that has lost its anonymity loses its potency as a soporific: as one slips into the collective dream he is needled into wakefulness by poking point of view. "What was most expected," sings the hollow-eyed chorus at the end of *The Bacchae,* "has not been accomplished." There were no surprises in the ritual of Dionysus.

Moreover, it is no accident that the shift from methectic to mimetic, participatory to passive, activity was accompanied by the creation of the figure of the artist, since he acts as a bridge between the old conception of the god and the new idea of the hero. To the Greeks the artist was much like a corybante, possessed with divinity, writhing with inspiration:

> . . . and therefore God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know that they speak not of themselves who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God is the speaker, and that through them he is conversing with us [Plato].

At the same time the artist is a victim, since only the goat, and the goat's flesh, can bring man and god together. (No wonder he nervously scribbles, "Musa, mihi, causas memora — the Muse sings, not I," at the top of his poem.) Not least, the artist has always been thought of as a divinity, immortal and omniscient, just as the divinity has always been thought of as an artist — potter, sculptor, image maker. In this way the figure of the artist recapitulates each element of the ritual of Dionysus, victim, victimizer, god. This essential ambiguity of the artist is derived from his position as the remnant of one ceremony and the precursor of another. On the one hand, he acts as a flesh and blood victim, drawing off to himself whatever energy remains in the communal ritual; on the other hand, he is treated with the same ambivalence as the heroes he creates (declared criminal, bohemian, clown, drunkard, deviate, atheist, addict, madman, invalid, *poete-maudite*). The result is Euripides — living like a hermit in his cave at Salamis, and dying like a god, ripped apart by the dogs of Archelaus, or, in another version, by a gang of women whom his style of life had outraged.

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The most obvious difference between the dance of the Bacchae and *The Bacchae* is that one has only participants, the other an audience, which is another way of pointing out that the ritual is an action and the drama an illusion, a representation, shadows. Here magic, there a trick. But the activity of the corybantes and the passivity of the spectator is not as crucial a distinction as it might seem. In the first place, it is not that much harder to provoke an audience to action than to move it to tears. The theater riot was once as common as the theater party, and ever since the fainting and miscarriages at the first performance of *Hippolytus,* smart managers have kept a doctor in the house. Furthermore, sitting in one's seat by no means precludes, almost certainly it enhances, terrific psychic activity as one's mind struggles to join the scene. What really distinguishes art from ritual is that art comes to an end. It is true that inasmuch as a spectator identifies with a character, inasmuch as he succumbs to illusion, he undergoes a little ecstasy. But identification and illusion are quite different from incorporation and hallucination; because a drama finishes, it necessarily separates the audience from fantasy and returns each member to himself and to reality. The Bacchante, however, walks away with the god in her bowels. Nothing can touch her, least of all doubt. Reality recedes. Ritual is a series of beginnings, but every play is built around its end.

The Bacchae is usually misinterpreted as a vindication of Dionysus and his ritual, or at any rate as a rebuke to whomever would withstand the magic of his wand. "Accept, accept," sing the chorus, and generations have fallen into line, most especially our contemporaries, who use the song to wrench the play into the Theater of Cruelty, a dramatization of "higher determinism," the instincts' necessity. Indeed, much the greater part of *The Bacchae* does seem like an oceanic state, where every boundary has been obliterated in the sweep of the tide. Animals are suckled at the corybantes' breasts, gazelles and young wolves are nestled in their arms, and in return the earth gives up water, wine, milk, honey. The hills around Thebes are a peaceable kingdom, in which man and nature and god thrill to each other, sympathetically atuned:

> "O Iachus! Son of Zeus!" "O Bromius!" they cried until the beasts and all the mountain seemed wild with divinity. And when they ran, everything ran with them.

Because there is no distinction here between conscious and unconscious, wish and fulfillment, because, in short, repression does not exist, the play is full of what to an outsider's eye must seem images of inversion and perversion, a general sense of misdirected energy, reversal,

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paradox: old men act like children, Zeus gives birth from a "man's womb," women behave like men and men dress as women, the gods disguise themselves as mortals and mortals are possessed by gods, civilization turns wild, the wilderness tame, sane men go mad, madmen invoke logic, girls route soldiers, and, most prominently, a mother destroys what she has created. To a participant, however, all these things are symptoms of paradise, proof of that unity of human and nonhuman, mind and body, sacred and profane, to which the ritual is dedicated. Without hierarchy there is no disorder, no reversal if all things are one.

The only trouble with this harmony is that it is hermetic, closed as the canopy that covered medieval hemispheres. Any intrusion suggests that there is, after all, an outsider and an other; any interruption means that there is a different way of telling time. Thus Pentheus — skeptical, rational, repressive, a huntsman and jailor — is to the Bacchantes what Copernicus was to a roomful of theologians. His conversion (he exits calling for armor and enters in drag, his life upended, a self-parody, more feminine than Dionysus, madder than the Maenads) and subsequent victimization, while not technically a sparagmos (because he is not eaten), is clearly meant to stand for one:

> One tore off an arm, another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs were clawed clean of flesh and every hand was smeared with blood as they played ball with scraps of Pentheus' body.

He is incorporated into a universe whose established rhythms (a game, in which he is the ball; a hunt, of which he is the trophy) are triumphantly reaffirmed. All is one. The ritual ends. But the play goes on, and the rest of *The Bacchae* is a wakening. Agave, the chorus, Cadmus, Tiresias — all shake off the trance and face the horror, and assume the burden, of what they have done. Euripides is clearly asking us to compare the effects of theatrical illusion with those of ritual hallucination. For those bewitched there is no calm, no ease of reconciliation, only a dulling guilt, the aftertaste of pollution — "You are unclean." In the theater, however, the dreamer's soul wisks back to the dreamer. Pentheus stands for Dionysus; but because he is a voyeur, an observer, he also represents the audience, viewing from afar but not participating in the action. As a god he ends jigsawed on a stretcher; as a spectator he leaves the theater whole.

When *The Bacchae* is performed now (and that is often; as one might expect, the play is replacing *Oedipus* in the classical repertory, much as *Lear* has replaced *Hamlet* in the Shakespearean), there is no such awakening. In Tavel's *Gorilla Queen,* the Pentheus figure, Clyde

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Batty ("brute in the junkel stays and man goeth separate ways"), is reborn after he is destroyed, transmogrified into a new creature, the audience's own true love, mate of its hidden desires, spouse of the mass mind. In *Dionysus '69* it is the audience, not Pentheus, which loses its head in the dance and does not get it back; instead we are supposed to find our bodies in a series of ceremonies so inept they carry no more force than charades. What these two plays share, aside from their inspiration by Euripides, is their wish to be taken as ritual, not theater; as action, not the imitation thereof. And this is so not only because they force the audience to participate — even Broadway throws the ball to the crowd once in a while — but because they clearly conceive of themselves as acts of communion with the magical capacity to transform the audience into a congregation, free it of the mind's tendency to, as Batty says, "cage, categorize, define," and make it wholly a creature of instinct, polymorphously perverse perhaps but otherwise amorphous, without boundaries, ameboid Bacchantes.

Imagine a theater in which Prospero does not break his wand but, like Dionysus, contrives to emplant it in his worshippers, like an electrode, close to the heart. "Oh, brave new world," cries Miranda, to which the old magician, out of rabbits, replies simply, "'Tis new to thee": which is to say, reality has not budged, only the goat is gone. But the new rituals of communion, no less than the old, are content with nothing less than to change the world. On election day, a pig-headed member of SDS stood in Union Square and gave a performance. It was, at first, a traditional mimetic drama, that is, there was no doubt that this was an imitation of a candidate's press conference — *What will you do about the crisis of the cities?; Rome was not destroyed in a day!* — and that the pig's head was a mask. The turning point may have occurred when the actor dropped his NLF standard and picked up and kissed a Nazi flag. It seems a swastika possesses as much of the sacred as a butterfly. In any case, soon afterward the revolutionary was answering questions — *What is your platform?* — by running about and squeeling, *Oink! Oink! Oink!* The distance between the actor and the political processes he portrayed had been collapsed. He was the embodiment of the very forces he had intended to ridicule. The man and the mask were fused. But he had not lost his audience, which stood about in clusters, many costumed, many tattooed, their hair long as the corybantes', their minds dimmed with drugs as their predecessors' had been with wine: a generation more open to incantation, clearly, than to interpretation, communion than commentary — fierce possession, never point of view.

What are we to make of the exhaustion of a tradition that has sus-

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tained us for twenty-five hundred years? It should be said initially that, from a theatrical perspective, the man with the pig's head has a tradition of his own, comedy, which was born from the phallic songs that accompanied the same ritual of Dionysus. As the Thracian religion moved southward, into civilization, and as the ritual began to change from communion to catharsis, the spirit of comedy, unmalleable as laughter, was in a sense squeezed from the dance into an arena of its own, the satyr play, in which the unrepentant, unrehabilitated animal instincts were free to perform. The satyrs — like that entire Greek menagerie of sileni and fawns, sphinxes and minotaurs, tritons and mermaids, sirens and centaurs — represent not so much men in the guise of goats as goats pretending to be men, their *phalloi* extended before them like rods of divination, tapping hidden resources of energy, ready in a moment to drop the disguise and seize the paradise of their instincts. As Nietzsche pointed out, the satyrs are "nature beings who dwell behind all civilization." He failed to add that from their place at the rear of civilization they are in a perfect position to sabotage it, just as from their place at the end of a tragic trilogy they were in a perfect position to burlesque what had come before. Comedy seeks all the things — union and generation of energy — usually ascribed to tragedy. Thus it is comedy that was performed at a time of withering, in winter, at the Lenaea, when men most feel the need to reassure themselves of their — and nature's — fertility and most desire to infuse their chilled lives with passion. Tragedy was performed in the spring, at the Dionysia, at a time of swelling, bursting, thrusting powers, a time badly in need of dissipation and discharge. The history of drama is in part the story of how, once cast away and behind the tragic festival, the chorus of satyrs has managed to smuggle itself back to the center of the stage. In some ways their reentrance may be symbolized by the event in Union Square, which in turn may well be a response to the fact that on that November day we marked the very winter of our lives.

It must also be said that the proposition that the tradition of catharsis, of desacralization, has sustained us is no more likely than that it has brought us to our present state. What is revolutionary about the young is that they have discovered a radical goodness in the very instincts that civilization has viewed with distrust. The ethic of love, which so permeates their lives, is an expression of faith in the purity of what we have always called impure; it is also a means of living out that faith, of bringing about the inner unity of the individual and of mankind, since love is, after all, a means of combining, joining, conglomerating, of making one where there were two, of reducing the various and

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the many to a seamless whole. In the broadest sense, the act of love and the Dionysian vision are identical, since it is "Eros which holds together everything in the world [Freud]" and so allows the lover to couple the earth. Thus the hostility of society toward the hippie, seemingly so irrational and outsized, has the same basis as Pentheus' hatred of the new god. However dimly, the passerby must know that the bombed-out Maenad on the brownstone stoop nods to the same comets that fire the night, and that when the poet crosses his legs and spins his paper wheel, the universe turns. The threat is to a culture which has staked everything on holding the world apart and which senses that the return of the native to his global village is at hand.

Perhaps. The possibility remains that we are rushing not to a garden of delight but away from a civilization of intolerable demands. That this is indeed the case — that we seek to escape history not because we anticipate its end but because of the burden its continuation entails, that the desire for unity is a decoy for the inability to live with doubt — is suggested by the evolution of the last great system of cathartic desacralization, psychoanalysis. The first few years of Freud's practice were devoted to what his first patient, Anna O., called the "naming cure," and what Freud and Breuer referred to as the cathartic and hypnotic method. In this technique the patient lies passively on a couch and, under hypnosis, works his way back to a recollection of the distant trauma whose victim he remains. The catharsis was supposed to occur upon discovery and verbalization ("naming"), but from the start it was plain to Freud that something was wrong. In the first place the trauma always turned out to be the same dreary tableau: a childhood seduction by what soon came to be an army of perverse parents and the entire Viennese servant class. In the second place, it was obvious that, despite the best efforts of the analyst, he could not help manipulating the patient's response through what Freud was later to call "the tyranny of suggestion." Thirdly, when the session was over, the symptoms returned. Eight years after he began to practice it, Freud, thrown into "absolute helplessness," was forced to admit that the hypnotic method was a blind alley. That cul-de-sac looks very much like tragedy. The drama, no less than the technique, views the audience/patient as passive and inordinately subject to suggestion, which is exercised by the playwright/analyst. In both disciplines, the performance ends. In each case words and images are substituted for action. In each case catharsis (expulsion of miasma/anxiety) is meant to occur when the unknown is made known. In each case, it does not — or does so no longer. The fundamental flaw common to both symptoms is an overestimation of the effects of knowledge upon experience and an under-

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estimation of the proximity of physical and psychic reality, unconscious and conscious.

Psychoanalysis really began when Freud rejected hypnotism and replaced it with the technique of free association, in which the patient is no longer a passive figure manipulated by a Prosperine analyst. Instead he transforms his doctor (who, Freud wrote, was "to surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity") into the masked characters that ply his dreams, Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Teacher, Friend — stock antagonists of his own melodrama. The present becomes the past, the distance between knowledge and experience is erased, and history is destroyed. Acting out (lately, touch therapy) takes the place of words. And instead of ending, the performance (lately, a marathon or an institutional retreat) becomes interminable. We are back in the realm of methectic ritual. Most important, Freud came to understand that his patients had been seduced in their imaginations not in their cribs, and that the distinction between the two was a false one: "Hence," he wrote, "psychic reality deserves to be given a place next to actual reality."

Are we to assume that Freud discovered the flaws in the cathartic technique and, within a decade, corrected them, when it has taken our culture millenia to decide that anything was amiss? Because psychoanalysis moved from illusionary drama to methectic ritual does not, by itself, mean that it also shifted from a ritual of desacralization to one of communion. To the end of his life Freud's vision was unremittingly tragic. No man remained so sensitive to division, separation, antinomy, conflict, as he. Civilization presupposes discontent, and while he once allowed himself to say that "I have endeavoured to guard myself against the enthusiastic partiality which believes our civilization to be the most precious thing we possess," the consistency of imagery with which he spoke of the relations between intellect and instinct — consciousness, the busy engineer, reclaiming the unconscious, Zuider Zee; ego in the saddle, atop the stallion, id — indicates that when push came to shove he favored a more perfect repression ("common human unhappiness") to the joy of liberation.

Insofar as psychoanalysis remained dedicated — and while Freud lived it did — to the separation of ego and id, and the protection of, the inviolability of, the discrete personality from the demands of the group (itself almost a metaphor in Freud's terminology for the unconscious or the id), it could claim to be a cathartic technique. But recently there has been a transformation, no more acutely described than in this passage from Claude Lévi-Strauss:

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> But [there is a] distressing trend which, for several years, has tended to transform the psychoanalytic system from a body of scientific hypotheses that are experimentally verifiable in certain specific and limited cases into a kind of diffuse mythology interpenetrating the consciousness of the group . . . (This group consciousness is an objective phenomenon, which the psychologist expresses through a subjective tendency to extend to normal thought a system of interpretations conceived for pathological thought and to apply to facts of collective psychology a method adapted solely to the study of individual psychology.) When this happens — and perhaps it already has in certain countries — the value of the system will no longer be based upon real cures from which certain individuals can benefit, but on the sense of security that the group receives from the myth underlying the cure and from the popular system upon which the group's universe is reconstructed. . . . By continuously expanding the recruitment of its patients, who begin as clearly characterized abnormal individuals and gradually become representative of the group, psychoanalysis transforms its treatments into conversions.

We arrive, in Lévi-Strauss' words, at a magico-social system, or, if you will, at a new ritual of Dionysus, whose sole purpose now, as then, is to demonstrate "the coherence of the psychic universe," to provide a system of thought in which all "contradictory elements can be integrated" — in short, to reduce the difficulties of the many to the simplicity of the one, to deny the distinction, first between sanity and madness, then between mind and matter itself, and then, familiarly, to render the very concept of distinction absurd, so that the worshipper dances in a universe without dissent, but shot through with divinity. It is a totalitarianism that the revolutionaries in Union Square would not wish to espouse any more than Freud would wish to practice, yet the irony of that audience is that, whether committed to radical action or to dropping from the culture altogether, they in fact acquiesce and participate in ways they never dream. For, as the followers of Dionysus were at one with hills and stream, these fresh Bacchae are profoundly attuned to the rhythms of their square — the stunted trees and yellow grass, the buzz and wink of daytime neon, the curl of fumes on a poisoned breeze, the honk and whine and screech and blare — and that, as their spokesman became what he intended to satirize (and as the patient becomes what he dares to expose) so, too, they swoon to a world they mean to change.

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David Bronsen

A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY ROTH

I visited Henry Roth on his Farm near Augusta, Maine, and we began to talk. At one point I remarked that he had never lost his command of language. He replied: "That comes from having talked with myself for twenty-five years."

It's too bad I was not older when I was brought to America, so that I could recall the Old World and the original home of my mother and father. I was born in Tysmenitsa, near Lemberg, Galicia, in 1906, and was only eighteen months old when my mother brought me to this country.

My father had gone to New York and saved up enough money to bring my mother and me over in steerage. This is the material I used in the prologue of *Call It Sleep*. Since there was no birth certificate, there was some doubt about my age. My father said I was two and a half years old when I came, but my mother maintained I was a year younger. As proof she used to point out that my sister, who was conceived in America, was two years younger than I am, so I imagine that her version of my age is correct.

My parents settled down in Brownsville at first, which corresponds to certain passages of the novel. Two years later we moved to Ninth Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. When we lived there in the years 1910 to 1914, the East Side represented a very secure enclave. Everyone in our building was Jewish, as were the neighbors to either side of us and the people across the street. Had I thought of it in those terms back them, I would have said that I was surrounded by a homogeneous environment and that I completely identified with it. In that atmosphere of devoutness and orthodoxy it would not have occurred to anyone to question the dietary regulations or the observance of

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holiday rituals. Those were the years when the huge influx of Eastern Jewish immigration was building the area up. The East Side was helpful, communicative and highly interrelated — in short, a community. It was a place with the promise of opportunities and new horizons, where one could make a new start in life. And the Jew in those years was optimistic and dynamic, full of the feeling that nothing was holding him back.

We lived in Ninth Street till I was eight years old, and then in the summer of 1914 we moved to Harlem. My mother's parents, along with several uncles and aunts, were brought over just before the outbreak of the First World War and settled by my maternal uncle in a steam-heated, hot-water apartment in Harlem. My mother wanted to be near her parents, which accounted for our moving there too. The move turned out to be crucial for me.

We settled at 108 East 119th Street, near the trestle of the New York-New Haven Railroad. This part of the neighborhood, squeezed in between Little Italy to the east and the more prosperous and predominately Jewish area to the west, was considered the poorer part of Harlem. It was a mixture of Irish, Italians and Jews, and a rough mixture. I was taken from a neighborhood that had been home for me and put in a highly hostile environment. That produced a shock from which I have perhaps never recovered. Until then I had had a natural love of activity and enjoyed the companionship of other children. I had been a good student in school as well as in *cheder*. After the move to Harlem all that changed and I took to avoiding outside contact by staying in the house and near Mama as much as possible, so that I grew fat with the lack of activity. In fact, that is what the children used to call me — "fatty." For weeks I cried and had tantrums, begging to be taken back to Ninth Street. But no one paid any attention to me, nor was there any concern when I received C's for the first time on my report card. I got into fights at the new school for a while, but I soon learned to avoid any provocation. I retreated into myself and stayed out of people's way. Serious psychological damage had been brought about by this uprooting of a naturally conservative child, and it expressed itself after a while in my rejection of Jewish faith and customs, which until then had been a part of me. I felt no anguish over this at the time — I was throwing it all to the winds. My mother, who was the only source of security, did not understand what was going on, although I suppose her example was also influencing my behavior. She herself was reacting against the fanatical orthodoxy of her father, which had oppressed her as a child and a young woman. If her faith had not been tongue in cheek I might have been insulated against the influ-

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ences of Harlem. But she did not seem to care if I became a Goy or not, and damn it, I became a Goy!

My father was also not particularly orthodox, he merely went through the motions. He did not fail to celebrate Seder and observe Yom Kippur, but at the core true devoutness no longer existed. My father had a pat phrase that he appended to every reference to God, which he continues to use till this day: *"op si doh a Gott"* — "if there is a God."

Looking at it in another way, I suppose my parents went through some of the same dislocation by coming to America that I experienced by moving to Harlem. That kind of change is much more of a trauma for the Eastern Jew than for the Westerner. The Jew coming out of his little Eastern European hamlet, with its insularity and stagnation, is likely to undergo a radical transformation when he gets caught up in the tumult and perpetual change of American life.

In any case, the move in 1914, the Goyish environment and the negative example of my parents threw me into a state of turmoil. I had gone to Harlem with a pronounced Jewish bent and proceeded to take on the conflicting characteristics of my new surroundings. It was as if two valences of the same element were at odds with one another; at the time, of course, I could not intellectualize about the contradictions involved, but I did feel them emotionally, and my response took the form of rebelling against Judaism. I fought as hard as I could against going through with the Bar Mitzvah, even though my parents insisted on it and finally had their way. But only a year later, when I was fourteen, I firmly announced that I was an atheist.

Call It Sleep is set in the East Side, but it violates the truth about what the East Side was like back then. Ninth Street was only a fragmentary model for what I was doing. In reality, I took the violent environment of Harlem — where we lived from 1914 to 1928 — and projected it back onto the East Side. It became a montage of milieus, in which I was taking elements of one neighborhood and grafting them onto another. This technique must have grown out of the rage I had been living with all those fourteen years. I was alienated — to use that old hack of a word — and my novel became a picture in metaphors of what had happened to me.

All the rancorous anti-Semitism which Hitler was beginning to epitomize was not limited to Germany alone. To a lesser degree it was being felt everywhere. It may be difficult to explain how such social forces affect the individual psyche, but it is clear that they have powerful behavioral effects. My own experience of being thrown into a neighborhood where anti-Semitism was growing provides an example, and

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the scene in *Call It Sleep* in which David Schearl lamely denies his being Jewish to the gang that is threatening him is an objectification of the same thing.

The characters in the novel have a cohesion of their own, but to really understand them you have to go through the characters and back to the author to find out what was motivating and disturbing him. I needed empirical reality for the sake of its plausibility, but I took off from it on a tangent. In other words, I was working with characters, situations and events that had in part been taken from life, but which I molded to give expression to what was oppressing me. To a considerable extent I was drawing on the unconscious to give shape to remembered reality. Things which I could not fully understand but which filled me with apprehension played a critical role in determining the form of the novel. The father in the novel is a powerfully built, menacing person given to uncontrolled violence. My own father, who served as a model for this figure, was basically an impulsive little man with poor judgment, and perhaps a little unbalanced. He did not beat me often, but when he did he went crazy. Because I felt I could be overwhelmed at any time by forces that were constantly threatening me, it became necessary to change this little man into someone capable of real destruction. Violence is associated as a rule with great strength, and to the mind of a child an adult seems to be seven feet tall.

I worked with polarities in expressing the subjective reality of the little boy in the novel. I am referring to the personalities of the mother and father, as well as the characters of the mother and her sister. Actually, my own mother was the source of both of these contrasting female figures. I abstracted one side of my mother, rounded it out and created an aunt who in most respects is the antithesis of David Schearl's mother. The presence of Aunt Bertha seemed to give an aesthetic justification to the character of the mother as well.

My parents were hopelessly mismatched, and their life together was marked by furious quarreling. My mother, who felt profoundly cheated in her husband, could never bring herself to express the full force of her feelings against him until late in life, when an outbreak of paranoia tore down all her reserve. In her earlier years she turned all her attention to me. Since at that age I could hardly have any recourse to depth analysis, the Oedipal fixation that took hold of me was to keep me firmly in its grip.

I made use of a number of incidents out of my childhood experiences, but recast them in a manner that is just as revealing of the author's frame of mind and his hindsight as it is of the character of the little boy. The critical episode in the novel of thrusting the milk dipper

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into the car track is an example. A couple of boys had enticed me into doing that for the sake of a prank. The author turned the incident into a personal statement: the impressionable boy living in hostile surroundings adopts as his own a destructive act to which he is instigated by outsiders to whom he has no personal relationship.

After publication of *Call It Sleep* a number of critics pointed out what they thought were its social implications. My own feeling was that what I had written was far too private for me to have given much thought to specific social problems. My personal involvement had absorbed my entire consciousness, leaving no room to focus on anything else.

When I force myself to be objective I realize that if I had not moved to Harlem I most likely would never have written the novel. But during the anxieties and hardships of the intervening years I have told myself that I would not hesitate to sacrifice *Call It Sleep* for a happy childhood, adolescence and young manhood. Given the choice, I would have stayed on the East Side until I was at least eighteen years old. Then I would have gone forth.

Of course, I can see that moving to Harlem was a formative experience in its own right. It had the virtue of compelling an enlargement of vision and sympathy. I was presented at an impressionable age, when everything becomes emotionally charged, with the problem of trying to integrate in my mind a much greater diversity and many more contrasting forces than I would have known otherwise. If we had stayed on the East Side and I had gone on to write — two big ifs, because I wanted to become a biology teacher when I was a boy — it is possible that I might have written some honest portrayals of Jewish life on the East Side. Such writing would necessarily have reflected Jewish life *as* Jewish life, which is not the case with my novel; I do not regard *Call It Sleep* as primarily a novel of Jewish life. There is something positive in the writer striving for the broader awareness that enables him to interrelate many more disparate elements in an art form; such an aim, by its very nature, requires the consideration of a much wider world than the one I originally came from.

As an illustration you can take the case of Robert Frost. From my knowledge of his verse, Frost never broke through what might be called the bucolic curtain. Emotionally and ideologically he played it safe by never going out into the larger world to test his attitudes and views. Had I stayed on the Lower East Side I also would have been spared having to submit my feelings and beliefs to a wider experience and understanding.

During the years in which I devoted myself to writing *Call It*

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Sleep I came to regard myself as a disciplined writer who could turn his hand to whatever literary task he cut out for himself. I knew that the flow of creativity would not be uniform, and I had come to expect resistance from my material, but I felt that by working at it I could resolve all the difficulties I encountered. My self-confidence approached the point of arrogance in those years. I remember in a moment of introspection reviewing in my mind the authors and literary works that I considered important and that had personally affected me. At the same time, and with a good deal of pride, I felt that I was consciously fighting literary influences and going my own way.

T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Eugene O'Neill were the writers of major stature that interested me back then. Eliot's *Waste Land* had a devastating effect on me, I felt stunned by the vastness of its conception. I had been introduced to the work by Eda Lou Walton, a professor of literature at New York University. It was to her that I dedicated *Call It Sleep*. She was a woman twelve years older than I, who was very devoted to me and who for a time supported and sponsored me. Our relationship had certain parallels to that of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein, although I do not stress the resemblance.

Some of the plays of Eugene O'Neill left a deep imprint. I went to see *The Great God Brown* with Eda Lou and came away feeling that I had been listening to the inner voice of a man.

I had already read Joyce as a freshman in college, and a copy of *Ulysses* which Eda Lou had brought me from France introduced me to an entirely new way of seeing things. I felt I could see doors swinging open on untried possibilities in literature.

But during the time I was writing the novel I was trying to establish a demarcation between myself and other authors. As far as I was concerned, no one could teach me anything and nothing was too big an undertaking.

I started writing *Call It Sleep* in 1929, worked on it for four years and finished it in 1933, when I was twenty-seven. A substantial part of the book was written in Maine, in the small town of Norridgewock, in 1932. I learned of a farmhouse where an elderly widow, a woman of seventy, boarded the local schoolmistress; and since this was summer and the room vacant, she agreed to take me in as a boarder. For seven dollars a week I got room and board — and was fed royally. I had nothing to do but work on my novel, which I did from June till November. It was a happy stay, and years later, when I was casting about for a place in which to settle down, it must have been the memory of those satisfying months that made me decide on Maine.

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The book was published in 1934 by Ballou and Company. I paid little attention to the contract at the time and just wondered how the publisher could possibly hope for any financial return on the book in the middle of the Depression. Viewed from today's vantage point, you would think Robert Ballou had a gold mine in his possession. Meyer Levin was one of his authors and John Steinbeck, who was just getting started, was another. But his firm was having difficulties, like so many others; one publisher after another was going on the rocks and selling his writers to the more affluent survivors. Owing to Ballou's rather desperate financial straits, he was relieved when David Mandel, a lawyer, put some money in the firm. That gave Mandel a share of the business and certain rights in deciding policy. Ballou was already favorably inclined to the book, and David Mandel, who subsequently married Eda Lou Walton, submitted to her urging to have the book published.

In later years people would say to me, "You haven't written because you were not given any recognition." That is not true; for a first novel I was given a large measure of acclaim, enough to encourage any writer. And the fact is that I did write, for a time. . . .

Even before the publication of *Call It Sleep* I was at work on a new book. I had met a colorful person around whom I was building my second novel. The man was a tough, second-generation German–American who had been raised on the streets of Cincinnati and relied on his fists and his physical stamina to cope with life. Being an illiterate, he had acquired almost everything he knew through his own experience. I was attracted to him because he always took pride in being able to defend himself, no matter what happened. His build and the way he carried himself made me think of a champion middleweight fighter, and as a matter of fact, he had trained with professionals. When he told me that he had never been beaten I was inclined to believe him. Then suddenly this man who had fought and brawled his way through life lost his right hand in an industrial accident. With that came the terrible shock and realization that he was no longer able to fight the world alone. His personal tragedy and the knowledge that he would have to turn to others for help were terrifying blows that hit him at the depth of the Depression and changed his whole outlook on life.

Like many intellectuals during the Depression, I had become attracted to Marxism and felt the Communist Party to be its true expression. It was as a result of my contact with the Party that I met my German acquaintance and conceived the idea of basing a novel on him. The man and what I learned about him fitted in with what I

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thought the Party stood for. I carefully gathered the data of his life as well as my observations concerning him, and wrote about a hundred pages of manuscript. He had become an organizer for the Party, and several times I went along with him to distribute leaflets on the waterfront, where I used the Italian I had been studying on my own to make contacts with the longshoreman. There was no CIO at that time, and the Party was espousing the cause of industrial unions on the waterfront, in the same way that Harry Bridges had been doing on the West Coast.

One day while I was accompanying him on his assignment, my "character," whose instincts for danger were better than mine, warned me, "Better stay close to me." With a hook for a hand he was still a man that no one was likely to cross. But I wandered away from him in the process of handing out the leaflets.

The aims of the Communist Party had been coming into conflict with those of the AFL, which was well entrenched among the longshoremen. I was approached by one of the business agents of the AFL, who asked me for a leaflet. When I held it out to him he belted me across the face, smashed my glasses and proceeded to beat me up, all the time driving me across the highway as he pounded away at me. By the time my friend came running towards me the incident was over, but for a man of sensibility no further lesson was needed about the animosity and antagonism that arise from a struggle over vested interests.

In the meantime, Ballou had gone bankrupt and sold Scribner's the rights to my second book. During the negotiations I had submitted the unfinished manuscript to Scribner's editor, Maxwell Perkins, who was so enthusiastic that he predicted the novel would be one of the outstanding books in contemporary American fiction. The poor man — he died without getting the rest of the manuscript. Once the contract was signed and Ballou was paid, I did not write another word. I had mapped out in detail the course I was to follow in each chapter of the book, but I seemed to have arrived at an utter impasse.

Only after completing all the rest of *Call It Sleep* did I go back and write the prologue. But after doing the first hundred pages of the second book I changed directions and did the prologue as a pretext for not going on to Section II.

My second book was supposed to be a short but substantial novel, that I was going to follow with a longer one, for which I had been saving myself. This work was to be far more ambitious and of greater scope; in it I would deal with the Jewish intellectual embracing many more elements of the social world. But my second novel was not getting

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anywhere. For a time I made all kinds of excuses to myself, then I decided I had made a mistake by limiting my perspective to the mid-western proletarian that was turning revolutionary. I wanted the words to come flowing out of me again, and I needed a fresh start; as a physical demonstration of this recognition I burned the manuscript I had shown Perkins and set to work on the next novel. I wrote the opening chapters, which dealt with autobiographical material from Harlem, but I felt I was not reaching the mark. My notes called for bringing together a great many disparate aspects of society and weaving them into an artistic whole. More than anything else I required a sense of unity in the work I did, a unity that could almost be reduced to a metaphor. I struggled with both the style and content, getting only so far before once again running up against immobility and total frustration.

I found myself analyzing my views on progress and indulging for hours and days in mental excursions on the subject of moral righteousness. To my surprise I found myself in sympathy with the South and its myths of tradition and languorous women. I carried on debates with myself in which my intellectual judgment and my sensuous orientation were at odds with each other. Common sense told me that my principles required that I side with the more enlightened North, that my phantasies were ignoring the disadvantaged Negro and the ugliness of racism. To my horror I caught myself musing about the Nazi cult of German brotherhood, and then I would shudder when I stopped to think what they were doing to the Jews in Germany.

I suppose all this was a revulsion from the emphasis on the struggle for social justice. The intellectual decision to identify myself with the proletariat had created a crisis which brought into sharp focus my dichotomy as a human being. I knew that justice was at stake, that Jews were involved, that one had to do something about poverty. But poverty is ugly and the proletarian bored me, with the result that the sensuousness in my nature was pulling me in the opposite direction. The artist in me had never gotten over the appeal of art for art's sake, which had flourished in the twenties. With this war going on inside of me I became immobilized to the point that I found myself incapable of making a narrative decision. All this is subjective evidence that something was knocking the props out from under me, that in spite of my tremendous creative urge something was working against me, stymieing me, preventing me from doing what I desired most. My efforts to get on with the novel petered out and the whole thing gradually shriveled and withered away, until finally I destroyed that manuscript as well. I re-

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gret that now. Had I kept the autobiographical material about Harlem it might have provided me at some later time with renewed motivation.

When a writer gives up what is most vital to him, the work in which he has placed his greatest hopes and which was going to be the object of his greatest efforts, he is undercutting his creative gifts and abilities. I was through. For a long time I thought that I was afflicted by some peculiar curse. But I have come to believe that there was something deeper and less personal in my misfortune, that what had happened to me was common to a whole generation of writers in the thirties. One author after another, whether he was Gentile or Jew, stopped writing, became repetitive, ran out of anything new to say or just plain died artistically. I came to this conclusion because I simply could not believe that anyone with as much discipline, creative drive, inbred feeling for the narrative and intense will to write as I had, could, after such rigorous efforts, still be baulked.

Looking about, I saw the same phenomenon manifesting itself in practically every writer I knew. They became barren. Daniel Fuchs decided after his third novel that he would write for Hollywood. He maintained that he had arrived at his decision clearly and rationally, but I do not believe that. James Farrell is another example. He had exhausted himself by the time he had written his third novel, and everything he wrote after that consisted of variations on played-out themes. Steinbeck is not radically different, as far as his real contribution is concerned; nothing else he ever wrote came up to *The Grapes of Wrath*. And Edward Dahlberg — what did he write after *Bottom Dogs* and *From Flushing to Calvary?* There was Hart Crane and Leonie Adams, both of whom ran into the stone wall of noncreativity. Crane committed suicide, and Nathanael West for his part conveniently died.

I have to get a cigarette — this works me up! [*Mr. Roth lit his cigarette deliberately, abruptly changed the subject and bantered for several minutes before resuming his train of thought.*]

How does one explain this peculiarity? It happened often enough that I began to reflect on it, and I have continued to reflect on it ever since. I do not have the training to make a scientific or sociological analysis, but it seems to me that World War II, which was already in the making, was a dividing line between an era which was coming to an end, namely ours, and another, which was coming into being. I think that we sensed a sharp turn in historic development. How do writers sense these things? We sense it in our prolonged malaise, and in our art — in the fact that, having been fruitful writers, we suddenly grow sterile. The causes are personal, but they are also bigger than any

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of us. When so many people are affected in the same way and each one is groping for his own diagnosis you have to look for a broader explanation.

To those of us who were committed to the Left, the Soviet Union was the cherished homeland; but that homeland had become an establishment which was interested in consolidating itself. In the Moscow trials the establishment was destroying the revolution, although at the time we were still loudly professing our allegiance. Events often do not become comprehensible until long after they have occurred.

I am throwing out these ideas as possibilities. The scholar who some day will be making a formal study of the question will undoubtedly find other things to single out. One interesting facet he will have to investigate is the influence such historical factors exert on the artist. How do they get into the writer's bloodstream and affect his creative sensibility? How are his potentialities inhibited? The world around him after all remains largely intact, but something inside of him has changed.

In 1938, when I was despairing of ever writing again, my relationship with Eda Lou Walton deteriorated. We separated, and almost immediately afterwards I met Muriel Parker at Yaddo, an artist's colony at Saratoga Springs. The following year we were married, but the only livelihood we had came from the WPA and relief. They had me working with pick and shovel laying sewer pipes as well as repairing and maintaining streets. In 1940 I wrote "Somebody Always Grabs the Purple," a story of a boy's visit to the public library, which was published in *The New Yorker*. When I notified the relief agency that I had received three hundred dollars for the publication I was reclassified as being no longer indigent, and promptly removed from the rolls.

Shortly after that I obtained a steady job as a substitute teacher at a high school in the Bronx. I decided that jobs offer security, that I would have to accept the obligations and compulsions that came my way and forget I had been a writer. When I discussed this with my wife we both agreed that I would never write again. I told myself I had done so many different things in the meantime that there would be no more suffering, yet there was some hidden reservation that lingered on and continued to crop up in moments of introspection.

By 1940 Europe was at war and the American economy was speeding up. I learned that people were being trained as craftsmen to turn out the immense volume of war material that was beginning to come off the assembly lines, and the thought of a skilled trade appealed to me.

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Although I had given up being a writer and accepted the idea that I would have to work for a living like everybody else, I still felt that anything remotely touching on my former interest — and that included advertising as well as clerical and office work — was repugnant to me. So I gravitated to machineshop work and became a precision grinder. That entailed doing the high precision finishing work on a variety of cutting tools, dies, fixtures and jigs. The machinists who carried out the earlier parts of the operation left me only a few thousandths of an inch to take off. The ordinary machinist does not care for such slow and demanding work, but I had always been interested in mathematics, which was necessary for the required calculations, and I came to like the work. In time I was classified as A-1 on the basis of the skill I acquired.

For six years I plied that trade and regarded myself as a machinist. During those years, perhaps because it had been the scene of my frustration, I developed a distaste for New York. I wanted to get away from anything that reminded me of my past as a writer. But leaving New York is a two-fold undertaking for a New Yorker. First of all he has to decide to make the break, having always looked upon New York implicitly as the only place in which he could live. Then he has to decide where he is going. In 1945 I finally made the move and took the family to Boston.

Fifteen years passed before I was to return even briefly to New York. I discovered then that it was no longer my New York. I had been so versed in the city, I could see the little detail that spoke for the whole, and had developed an expertise in conning the place. I went back to visit Ninth Street and the East Side, the neighborhood I had known and identified with, and discovered the whole area had become Puerto Rican. The great spirit that had once vitalized that stack of bricks was gone. Nevertheless, I was moved by nostalgia the first time I went back there; perhaps there was a touch of symbolism in my "return." But now I would like to see everything there bulldozed down and some fit habitations erected. My response to prowling through Harlem was markedly different. You experience nostalgia if you are aware of a former identity which has been displaced or replaced. I never had that kind of tie to Harlem, only the feeling that I did not belong.

After working in Boston during 1945 and 1946 I decided that was not the right place for me either. I found an inexpensive farm in Maine, not the one I am living on now, but in Montville, and the price of twelve hundred dollars included the house and barn. The one-hundred-ten acre farm described a ribbon a couple of hundred yards

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wide and a mile long. I bought the place in March, 1946, and two months later my wife and the two boys came out here to live. After continuing work for six more months in Boston I settled down with my family in Maine.

The years that followed were occupied with making a living and supporting the family. I started out by taking a job as a teacher at a school in which eight grades were all cooped up in one room. I never learned the knack of keeping them all busy; while I was teaching the eighth grade the first and second graders would get restless. I saw myself as a juggler trying to keep up an illusion of perpetual motion.

There followed a variety of odd jobs — from putting in heating insulation to fire fighting in the woods of Maine — whatever offered a livable wage. In 1949, the same year we moved to Augusta, I went to work as an attendant at the Augusta State Hospital and later became a psychiatric aide, a position I held for four years. By then both of my boys were in school and my wife was able to start teaching. From that point on we managed fairly well, although our income never amounted to much. My wife was a wonderful sport and took the ups and downs in her stride. My own attitude was that there was no real meaning outside of writing, so it did not really matter what I did.

Time passed, it became clear that the hospital job had no future, and I turned to something new. Since we were down in a hollow near a brook, I thought the farm would be a good place to raise waterfowl. With the help of my boys that is what I did for a number of years. I used to winter forty breeders each of ducks and geese in order to have fertile eggs in the spring. Then I would incubate the eggs and peddle the ducklings and goslings. I worked up a little trade in feathers too; goose feathers are worth two dollars a pound. When my sons came home from school they ran errands and did chores. That was a happy period for me; I found it wonderful to be working with my own boys.

My life during those years revolved around the family. From time to time I used to wish I could take part in intellectual discussion, but it was pointless to attempt that with the neighbors. There was always my wife, however, and discussion was carried on at home. The area of contact between myself and the natives has been very slight, just as the overlapping of that which is vitally important for them and myself is minimal. The result is that my family and I have lived rather retired lives, to the point where I seem no longer to miss anything in the way of larger human contact. Being a Jew has not provided fellowship either — nor has it been a problem. The Jewish population in Maine is small and I doubt that most of the people I deal with know that I am Jewish.

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When my older boy got a scholarship to Phillips Exeter Academy and, a couple of years later, the other one went away to finish high school, my wife and I found ourselves alone. It became necessary to find something less taxing than raising waterfowl by myself, so I took to tutoring Latin and math.

In the summer of 1959 Harold Ribalow, a critic of American–Jewish literature, came out here to talk with me about *Call It Sleep* and its possible republication. That was the first time it occurred to me that anyone might be interested in bringing out the book. I felt that from a business standpoint it would be a foolish venture and would not do any better than it had the first time. I was gratified, however, and hoped that it would result in some needed income. Ribalow pointed out that my copyright was approaching the expiration date, after which the book would become public domain. My obliviousness to that fact shows how divorced I was from literature and writing. As a result of Ribalow's interest the book was brought out by Cooper Square Publishers in 1960, and then in 1964, thirty years after the first publication, it came out as a paperback with Avon Books. After all those years of being out of print the book had become accessible again.

What I had perhaps overlooked is that one grows old and that a book like *Call It Sleep* can gain a certain value as an antiquity. At least I was still alive to see the revival of interest in the novel. I am sure that moving to Maine with its much slower pace of life, giving up the consuming attempt to keep writing at all costs, and the devotion of a steady and sensible wife account for my being alive today. Otherwise the republication of the book would have been a posthumous event. But as far as literature is concerned, I am in reality no longer alive. The renewed interest in *Call It Sleep* is being witnessed by a dead author who still happens to be ambulatory.

But strangely enough, this dead author may be going through a resurrection. I started writing again in the summer of 1967, simultaneously with the outbreak and conclusion of the Israeli-Arab war. I was in Guadalajara, Mexico, at the time, where I had gone with my wife on the royalties of *Call It Sleep,* and where I followed the daily events of the war in the local newspapers with great avidity. I found myself identifying intensely with the Israelis in their military feats, which repudiated all the anti-Jewish accusations we had been living with in the Diaspora, and I was glorying in their establishment of themselves as a state through their own application and resources. An intellectual excitement seized hold of me that forced me to set down what was going through my mind, to record my thoughts about Israel and my new

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reservations regarding the Soviet Union. What I wrote seemed to reflect a peculiar adoption. Israel did not adopt me; I adopted my *ex post facto* native land. What seemed important was that I identified with Israel without being a Zionist and without having the least curiosity about Israel as a practical, political entity. Suddenly I had a place in the world and an origin. Having started to write, it seemed natural to go on from there, and I have been writing long hours every day since then. I am not yet sure what it is leading to, but it is necessary and is growing out of a new allegiance, an adhesion that comes from belonging.

I had the need for us to be warriors; I had the need for us to be peasants and farmers, for us to exercise all the callings and trades like any other people. I have become an extreme partisan of Israeli existence — for the first time I have a people. All this made me conscious of a latent conviction — that the individual *per se* disintegrates unless he associates himself with an institution of some sort, with a larger entity. I could not find that kind of bond in religion, and I do not think the Israelis do either. I found it in the existence of a nation. I have not been able to turn for that to America, which is presently committing the folly of destroying itself, so at least for the present I have adopted a people of my own, because they have made it possible for me to do so. And I am further indebted to Israel because I am able to write again.

If there is anything dramatic about all this, I suppose it can be explained as the way a fictioneer does things. Significant for me is that after his vast detour, the once-Orthodox Jewish boy has returned to his own Jewishness. I have reattached myself to part of what I had rejected in 1914. Even before the Israeli-Arab war I was beginning to feel that there might be some path that would lead me back to myself, although I realized there was no returning to the Jews of the East Side of more than a half century ago. Then suddenly I discovered that I could align myself with a people that is forward-looking and engaged in the vital process of its own formation. And with the resumption of writing I find that I myself am reabsorbed into something that is immediately vital. One of the little — or big — projects I have undertaken is a work dealing with the artist responding to his world.

Being a Jew in the Diaspora is basically a state of mind, an attitude of not belonging. In that sense there are also Gentiles who are Jewish. Only two courses remain open to the Jew in America: he assimilates and disappears completely, while giving the best elements of himself to his native culture — and God knows that he has a lot to give; or he goes

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to Israel and does the same thing there. The emergence of Israel has proved to be the greatest threat to the continued survival of the Jew of the Diaspora. I do not think the Jew in America can exist much longer with a distinct identity, although he continues to make an attempt at it. I myself do not want the Diaspora. I am sick of it. Isn't it time we became a people again? Haven't we suffered enough?

Abruptly the emotional pitch subsided, and an infinite weariness took its place, as Mr. Roth concluded, "This has taken a lot out of me. I don't think I will be giving any more interviews."

The impassioned note on which the long session had ended contrasted with the relaxed, good-natured mood which prevailed at the dinner table. Mrs. Roth had waited patiently until late evening and the conclusion of the interview, at which time this equable woman of Anglo-Saxon stock served us a superb meal consisting of well-known staples and delicacies of the Jewish cuisine. That in turn brought on reminiscences from Henry Roth about his childhood on the Lower East Side. At one point Mrs. Roth spoke of the travels abroad she and her husband have undertaken in the last few years and remarked with a touch of humor, "Henry is a poor traveler. As soon as he gets somewhere he wants to settle down for good."

OLD PHOTOGRAPH

Eight years dead, and dying
Many months before that, you leave me
No trace of yourself except
These yellowing prints and some letters.
What do we know of the dead?
The needle of memory scratches
In the effort to remember.

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Everything has been taken care of,
The papers are filed,
Most of the photographs mislaid
In a cigar-box.
Only this propped-up pose remains,
Rigid on the mantel in pious memory.

While you were dying I shuddered
At every jolt of pain that shot through you,
Watched as you speechlessly
Contorted with a numb tongue
To speak of your dying.
I was told I would forget that
And retain the memory of you
In the sounds of your husky laughter,
Your charm in company,
The glee you took in never
Saying goodbye on the telephone.

It isn't true. "True feeling
Leaves no memory," as Stendhal said.
It has left me nothing of you
But reminders that remind me of nothing.
Besides, only grief, sleeplessness,
Infant despair, betrayal.
These are you. I know nothing else
About you any more. I live behind glass,
Framed as tightly as your picture,
As frozen, as rigid, as blind.
How can I keep in touch
When there is nothing to touch?

Peter Davison

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Geoffrey Cannon

THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

Once upon a time, before the mode of the music changed, rock singers aspired to quiver little girls' loins. Now, in 1968, the game had a bigger name. Dylan knew it already, retired to his house at Woodstock, furled in elemental rumor, circulating muffled tapes in semisecret. Would his clear voice (let alone his public presence) be too strong; or were events too strong for him? He chose not to answer. Meanwhile, city walls shook; and politicians became paranoid. For the sensed question was: had the time of the nameless idea come? (Nameless: German student spokesman — "We have no program. The revolution is the program.")

So; who, among the heroes, would find the pressure and the speed intolerable, as Kesey did? And who would stand? Did you think it an accident that posters of Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh are thumbtacked side by side with John Lennon and Mick Jagger? In 1968 the kids were on the streets, discovering what being serious meant. And they looked for a lead from the owners of the faces on the posters on their walls. It was no longer fun to be a superstar. The aura had become politicized. For Acid-Test graduates, the barricades were up. Hippies became yippies, and risked their heads.

Two further pressures on the Beatles and the Stones. First, dope busts. Brian Jones, ashen and alone in court, was, no doubt of it, an effective deterrent to public people adopting a blatantly dope–based life-style. And, whether or not "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" (etc., etc.) and "open our heads and the pictures come" (etc., etc.) had anything to do with dope, the police were briefed that it did, and that the Beatles and the Stones were Inciting; the bands knew of such briefings, and so became paranoid: and, of

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course, there was a causal chain between such songs and Jagger and Lennon's subsequent busts on private premises.

Second, the international emergence of Acid Rock. In 1966 the Beatles could successfully patronize the Byrds. And even in 1968, so the legend runs, Mick Jagger psyched Jim Morrison at a Doors concert on the West Coast, just by sitting in the front row and looking at him. But Country Joe, Big Brother, the Mothers, Steve Miller, Moby Grape, the Dead, the Airplane, the Doors, Love, bands all with different styles and preoccupations, and individually none as yet approaching the broadcast energy flow of the Beatles and the Stones, were all accelerating inexorably. All these bands were borne up by, and bore up, the Californian life-style, all were uncompromised and self-confident, all were redrawing the map of consciousness. Competition! During 1968, the musically most knowledgeable and adventurous kids in America, in England, in France, in the Netherlands, in Scandinavia, in Germany, turned to West Coast sound. Small, centrally placed record shops outside America displayed and sold great quantities of imported albums, at up to 50 percent above normal prices. This movement was underground only in the sense that Europe broadcasts very little West Coast music on radio or television. It was spreading, fast. The question was: were the Beatles and the Stones still out front?

The rumor was: no. The Beatles built their palace at 3 Savile Row, London W.1, and fooled around unsuccessfully with electronics and the Apple clothes store. Despite their protestations, the vibrations to the faithful were: screw you, we're in business. The Stones' office, five minutes from Savile Row, stayed reassuringly casual. And both bands were recording. The new albums would tell the tale.

Both *Sergeant Pepper* and *The Beatles* are enigmatic and ambiguous. But *Pepper* reverberated, because it connected. Eight months, now, after its release, there is no doubt that *The Beatles* has disintegrated. Tom Wolfe, talking of a Beatles' concert at the Cow Palace, outside San Francisco, on September 2, 1965 (1965!), saw it. "They have brought this whole mass of human beings to the point where they are one, out of their skulls, one psyche, and they have utter control over them — but they don't know what in the hell to do with it, they haven't the first idea, and they will lose it."

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And, in conversation with Paul McCartney: "when we started, you know, when Beatlemania started, we had this idea, of being invited to a Royal Command Performance, and we'd be on stage, and look at everyone, and, you know, the Queen, and we'd say 'Fuck You.' But we never did."

And they never did. As with the building of Apple, *The Beatles* shows them turned in on themselves, and unable either to satisfy or to project themselves; with the exception of George Harrison, who does his own, silver, contained thing. Harrison is cool, beautiful and has lived his experience. The music in "While my guitar gently weeps" is successfully compassionate. But to whom is the elegy addressed? Despite the emphatic orchestration, Harrison's voice wavers. "Savoy Truffle" is a better number, because it is slighter. The hee-haw chorus is to be enjoyed.

John Lennon, as he's broadcast, doesn't know his own mind. The only icon the Beatles have produced in the last twelve months is his sad naked *Two Virgins* cover, with Yoko Ono. Don't let the Lennon/McCartney attributions deceive you. All these numbers on *The Beatles* are either Lennon or McCartney: they are not together. "Glass Onion" is self-indulgent. The Beatles have lost the "now you see us, now you don't" race; Frank Zappa is laps ahead and laughing. Lennon is not a literary giant: his enigmas don't resolve, because they don't point anywhere. "Glass Onion" (unlike "I Am A Walrus") is not mind-expanding; it's the free-associations of a bright don't-give-a-damn kid. "Yer Blues" displays Lennon's agony. "My mother was of the sky/My father was of the earth/But I am of the universe." The universe, or nothing; and, maybe, Lennon senses, it's nothing. He is solitary. His voice is self-pitilessly empty in "Julia." No other band would dare cover this cut. Lennon puts only himself in it, as Billie Holiday did in her songs. In "Revolution No. 9" there's only noise, sweeping over and through his head, unformed, meaninglessly menacing. He can't cope. A voice: "everyone ever knew that as time went by they'd get a little bit older and a little bit slower." A sentence.

Some mischief-maker, probably himself, whispered in Paul McCartney's ear: "Gershwin." So, "Dear Prudence," "Martha My Dear," "Blackbird," "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," "Honey Pie." "Paul, you're a Composer, toss off some masterpieces." Toss off, right. Of

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course they're all nice numbers, pulling one's surface sensations here and there at Paul's will. They're facile, top-ten songs for other, valueless bands.

The Beatles kick out the jams only in their hard rock numbers: "Back in the U.S.S.R.," "Birthday" and "Helter Skelter." But the eclecticism of the first two numbers makes them evanescent. They may intend to be good jokes about the Beach Boys, Chuck Berry and Little Richard; in fact, they hide behind these out-front stars. "Helter Skelter" is the only cut on *The Beatles* that holds up in 1969. Its energy flow is autonomous, filling your head with all the reasons you have for exhilaration and action, never letting you go.

Most of the cuts on *The Beatles* are accomplished and talented. But talent is not the problem. The Beatles' presence has gone. The members of the band air themselves singly (even Ringo) and that's an abdication. Great rock affects us permanently; it moves us; it changes some part of our sensibility, so that afterwards we are different from what we were before, although the change may not be of a type we are accustomed to be articulate about. Eight months ago I gave strong praise to *The Beatles,* and now I know I was wrong: because it hasn't stuck. The Beatles haven't shaped up. They've lost; and they are lost to us.

The easy comparison between *The Beatles* and *Beggar's Banquet* is between the lyrics of "Revolution No. 1" and "Street-fighting Man." The interesting comparison is between the way the songs are sung. Lennon muses his way tonelessly through his song, not seeming to mind whether it's heard or not. Jagger gives you no chances. "Street-fighting Man" was first released, as a single, in America, and the first time I heard it was from a rushed-in import, played over a PA system at maximum volume, in a 2500 capacity hall in London, waiting to see the Doors perform. The perfect atmosphere. The story is that this number was banned in Chicago during the Democratic convention; and if so, no surprise. Jagger may say "but where I live the game to play is compromise solution" (thinking of Brian Jones?); but that isn't what he sings. His voice pours into your head, quarrying new lodes of menace and disturbance. His violent monosyllabic emphasis (*Ev*erywhere I *hear* the *sound* of *mar*ching, *char*ging, *feet,* boy) is relentless, inescapable.

Beggar's Banquet demonstrates the Rolling Stones' primal power

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at its greatest strength, made social and therefore inexhaustible especially by Mick Jagger. The special quality of rock music rhythm, when it is most dynamic, is to jam, and so distance and fade, all the sensations that otherwise crowd us, so that in the midst of the beat our minds are concentrated. When it works, this beat is comparable with the carrier wave necessary for broadcasting. The Stones' carrier wave is enomously magnified by their star quality; and they are unique in making full use of this power in their music. This is how Jagger, at full volume, makes us experience his sensations, rather than merely listen to them, and so awaken us to our own sensations. We are on the carrier wave with him.

It's not in Jagger to abandon his force. But, just as the content of broadcasting consists in modulating the carrier wave, so, with Jagger, faced by his knowledge of the fusion of politics and art, the question was not: how would he say it? but: what would he say, in *Beggar's Banquet*?

For the stakes had become so high that coasting was out of the question: a new album from the Beatles or the Stones had to dampen or catalyze, and be so seen. And Mick Jagger put himself on the line, risked his head and created his masterpiece: "Sympathy for the Devil." Let the music speak.

High-stepping drums, tapped delicately. Then two human cries, close to a hyena scream. Both echo. With the last, Bill Wyman starts shaking a vast maraca, sounding like a seeded gourd. The drumming is now faster, with the energy of the added noises. A smaller cry. Then masculine gasps and panting, as if a microphone were held close to the face of African dancers. Now, wide-spaced piano chords. Jagger begins insidiously and melodically, setting his voice up in suave contrast to the spiked music. "Please allow me to introduce myself, I'm a man of wealth and taste." Even at this point, seconds into a number that lasts over five minutes, there's no doubt that elemental sensations are in store.

At first, Jagger lets you hear few of his words. Then, in the first verse, some jump out. "I was around when Jesus Christ . . . moment . . . pain . . . made damn sure that Pilate . . . hope you guess my name." In the second verse, a switch. The piano gains melody, and the singing becomes jagged. The effect prickles in the gut. "Stuck around St. Petersburg . . . killed the Czar . . . screamed

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in vain . . . and the bodies stank . . . hope you guess my name." Listen over and over, and these key phrases inform both the more muffled words, and the music; this effect, which Jagger has always controlled precisely, gives the song depth, and moves you into the center of its mood.

Now he sings full throat, with the music swung into support, plus an incessant human chorus ("whhoo whhoo") swelling and whirring. Then the fully committed voice: "I shouted out, 'Who killed the Kennedys?' When after all it was you and me." Then the nerves set on edge, in a line, by Keith Richards' high electric-guitar chords.

In 1969, every great rock music band must speak to the people on the street. There are many different modes of relevant speech, ranging from the delicate witchcraft of the Incredible String Band to the blood roar of the MC5: both disaffect their audience from jobs and deals, and so, now, are both political. The revolution has no program; its quality will be judgable in terms only of the quality of the minds of the revolutionaries. The Acid Test has been taken; there's no retreating. Ineluctably, the kids are breaking on through to the other side. The nature of the other side entirely depends on the focus, strength, humanity and grace of their vision. The maps of this vision are drawn by rock music. *Beggar's Banquet* is crammed with apt force; with it, Mick Jagger is the shaman of the emerging western world. But the Beatles decided to stay in their hotel and feign sleep.

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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

The Inspector, John M. McGee, also said that an official who set up the paperwork procedures under which the fuel was stolen got a promotion and then suddenly was transferred to the South Pole when investigators uncovered the losses.

Mr. McGee, whose complaints of losses prompted an investigation by the General Accounting Office, was transferred by the Navy to a fuel supply office in Alexandria, Va., last November. In an interview today, he said fellow employes were avoiding him and his boss had told him his clerical job would be abolished in four months.
(*New York Times,* January 2, 1969.) Contributed by L. Becker, Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

Beggars in East Pakistan have demanded that the minimum amount of alms to be fixed at 15 paisa (3 cents). According to a report received here today from across the border, the demand was contained in a resolution passed at a convention of beggars held recently near Dacca.

The Convention also demanded that the interval between the knock at the gate and the offering of alms should not exceed 45 seconds. It also appointed a delegation to wait on the authorities and submit their demands.
(*Indian Express,* July 17, 1968.) Contributed by A. Pierce Nigli, Coimbatore, India.

"MARINE BRASS 'LOVE'-STRUCK"

"I don't think the guys who write this stuff are really in earnest about wanting peace or anything like that," he said.

"Some people may actually want peace, but I bet 99 per cent of these guys are just joking.

Editors' Note: *We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to* PR *will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the late comers.*

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"You see this stuff written all over," he added. "Words like 'make love not war' and that funny round symbol with the rocket shaped thing inside. It's just a way of bugging your superiors."
(*New York Post,* April 4, 1969.) Contributed by Seymour Britchtky, New York, New York.

"In another case, a nine-year-old boy engaged in exploratory sexual activity with an eight-year-old girl on a play lot. The girl's mother later complained to the police who recorded the offense as 'assault with intent to ravish.' "
(*Christian Science Monitor,* March 31, 1969.) Contributed by Wayne Douglas, Gainesville, Florida.

"The Beatles, and their mimicking rock-and-rollers, use the Pavlovian techniques to produce artificial neuroses in our young people. Extensive experiments in hypnosis and rhythm have shown how rock and roll music leads to a destruction of the normal inhibitory mechanism of the cerebral cortex and permits easy acceptance of immorality and disregard of all moral norms." — Rep. James B. Utt (Rep-Calif.)
(*San Francisco Chronicle,* March 30, 1969.) Contributed by Ralph D. Miller, San Francisco, California.

"A Labor Member of Parliament, Emanuel Shinwell, asked today in the House of Commons for assurance that in any future talks with which the British Government are associated, it must be clearly understood that no Arab from any of the Arab countries will be allowed to interfere with the underpants of a British soldier."
(*New York Times,* February 18, 1969.) Contributed by Bernard S. Morris, Bloomington, Indiana.

[T]he Duchess of Windsor [i]n an article for McCall's . . . opined that there's a danger of over-emphasizing sex. "It is so much discussed and advertised," she said, "that it's like hearing about a household product. Since most household products are associated with drudgery, isn't it barely possible that our young people will eventually look upon sex as drudgery and go out of their way to avoid it?"
(*The Boston Globe,* April 5, 1969.) Contributed by Mrs. Davis Herron, Milton, Massachusetts.

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BOOKS

NO EXIT

LOST IN THE FUN HOUSE. By John Barth. Doubleday. $4.95.

John Barth is what Robert Musil called a "possibilitarian," meaning someone blessed or afflicted with "a sense of possibility." "Anyone possessing it does not say, for instance, here this or that has happened, will happen, must happen. He uses his imagination and says: Here such and such might, should or ought to happen. And if he is told that something *is* the way it is, then he thinks: Well, it could probably be just as easily some other way. . . . Such possibilitarians live, it is said, within a finer web, a web of haze, imaginings, fantasy and the subjunctive mood [*The Man Without Qualities*]." Obviously without any sense of possibility man would be mindlessly mired in necessity, and the rejection of any one fixed patterning of reality is an effort which American heroes and authors alike are constantly making. But it is possible for the sense of possibility to get out of hand, and here Kierkegaard's comments in *The Sickness Unto Death* are especially pertinent. "Now if possibility outruns necessity, the self runs away from itself, so that it has no necessity whereto it is bound to return — then this is the despair of possibility." Barth has explored precisely this despair in some of his previous novels but it now seems to have touched the author himself. Again from Kierkegaard: "Possibility then appears to the self ever greater and greater, more and more things become possible, because nothing becomes actual. At last it is as if everything were possible — but this is precisely when the abyss has swallowed up the self."

Lacking "the sense of actuality" some people, says Kierkegaard, go "astray in possibility." In his latest book, brilliant as it is, I think that Barth has gone astray in exactly this way. *Lost in the Fun House* sufficiently indicates the impasse to which his sense of the arbitrariness of invention, and the unlimited number of possible fictions, has brought him. "What the hell, reality is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there, and literature never did, very long. . . . Reality is a

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drag." So said Barth in an interview. What seems to have happened by the time of *Lost in the Fun House* is that he can no longer get hold of any "reality" at all; everything he touches turns into fictions and yet more fictions. There is no reason for his words to follow in any one direction; as a matter of fact there is no reason why he should go on writing at all except that there seems to be an underlying feeling that identity is coextensive and coterminus with articulation. The "I" is only ascertainable as that which speaks: self is voice, but voice speaking unnecessary and arbitrary and untrue words. The torment of this book is that of a man who cannot really find any sanction for writing either in world or self, yet feels that it is his one distinguishing ability, the one activity which gives him any sense of self. In "Autobiography," intended for tape recording, voice turns on voice in a void. "Now that I reflect I'm not enjoying this life: my link with the world . . . . Are you there? . . . . I hope I'm a fiction without real hope. Where there's a voice there's a speaker. . . . I must compose myself. . . . I'll mutter to the end, one word after another, string the rascals out, mad or not, heard or not, my last words will be my last words." Words floating free in this way never encounter any necessity so they can drift on in self-canceling and self-undermining recessions as long as the voice lasts. If this is what "identity" is, it is surely in a precarious state.

This corrosive doubt about identity and its relation to language reveals itself in Barth's preoccupation with the relationship between self and name. Ambrose, who figures in a number of the stories, knows well "that I and my sign are neither one nor quite two," and I think this sense of the ambiguous relation between "I and my sign" is the focal point of a larger dubiety about the relationship between all names and bodies, between words and world. One rather grotesque story called "Petition" takes up the old Mark Twain "joke" about incompatible Siamese twins and gives it a philosophical twist. The petitioning brother is an intelligent almost mandarin figure who is seeking "disjunction" from the coarse brutish appetitive brother to whose back he is stuck. "He's incoherent but vocal; I'm articulate but mute." The incoherent brother is like life itself, constantly shrugging off the attempts of language to circumscribe it within particular definitions. Language, in the form of the articulate brother, would be happy to pursue its inclination to ponder its elegant patternings in pure detachment from the soiling contacts of reality. But they are brothers, divided yet related — neither one nor two. Like Ambrose who cannot work out the relationship between his self and his sign, so Barth seems to have reached a point where he cannot stop troubling himself with his uncertainty

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about the relationship between the words he invents, and the world he shares.

"Lost in the Fun House" approaches this problem again, with Barth never allowing us to forget the foreground presence of the typing man who, lost in the freedom of his inventions, can put down any words he likes in any order. "This can't go on much longer; it can go on forever." There is no pressure to keep the words in order, and they can start reversing their tracks and dissolving their statements as easily as they can advance to new stages in the account of Ambrose's family and the day they spent at the seaside. "Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author's imagination? . . . Are there other errors of fact in this fiction?" In such ways does the story destroy its own sustaining conventions. In addition, Ambrose, the boy who gets lost in the funhouse, is not clear whether what he is experiencing at any one moment is a private fantasy or a public fact, so the uncertainty surrounding any sequence of words is multiplied, leaving us with a sense of fictions within fictions within fictions. At the same time, an anguished sense that meanwhile "the world was *going on*!" just occasionally intrudes into this lexical paralysis: unvexed by reflection and possibility, in dark corners couples wordlessly copulate. One senses Barth's own dissatisfaction with the feelings of exclusion which beset the fiction-maker.

The funhouse itself seems to represent a variety of structures — in particular, that pseudo-world which man invents for his own amusement, the edifice of fictions with which we distract ourselves at all levels. Ambrose in the funhouse can imagine various endings to his adventure: Barth at his typewriter can imagine various endings to his story. There is a close connection between the character's situation in the story and the author's position among his words. "The climax of the story must be its protagonist's discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search." Both Ambrose and Barth may be destined to remain confined in their own fictions. "He died telling stories to himself in the dark." Thinks Ambrose about himself. Writes Barth about Ambrose. Says Barth about Barth. Unfixed in any one frame and unlocated in any one plane, the words float before us — in multiple perspective, in no perspective at all. But the closing narrative statement about Ambrose is clearly a refracted statement about the author. "He dreams of a funhouse vaster by far than any yet constructed . . . he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator — though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed." Barth has certainly built some fun-

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houses, but what one notices about *Lost in the Fun House* is that it is not a funhouse, but a series of depositions about building, or not building, funhouses. It is as though he cannot find any firm foundation on which his architectural abilities can take hold. A sort of plea seems to be contained in the following suggestion: "If one regarded the absence of a ground-situation, more accurately the protagonist's anguish at that absence and his vain endeavours to supply the defect, as itself a sort of ground-situation, did his life story thereby take on a kind of meaning?" But meaning itself is a dissolving notion in a verbal situation in which the narrator thinks that "the word . . . is now evidently nearing the end of its road." One conclusion to all this nonprogressive muttering is that fiction, having acknowledged its fictitiousness, must "establish some other, acceptable relation between itself, its author, its reader." By being exhaustive in making fiction display its own fictitiousness, Barth is perhaps clearing the ground for this new and necessary relationship. Meanwhile no stories get told, no funhouses get built on their ground of no ground. The interest of this in some ways rather oppressive book, is that it suggests that one of the most inventive and prolific of all contemporary American writers has discovered that the freedom provided by what Nabokov called "lexical playfields" may precipitate new kinds of anxiety and incapacity.

Barth has always been fascinated by triangular relationships, and they abound in this book — the Siamese twins, and the one girl they share; Narcissus, Tiresias and Echo who seem to reflect the complicated relations between "teller, tale, told"; and, most interestingly, Menelaus, Proteus and Helen in "Menelaiad." Here Barth takes up the image of Menelaus struggling with Proteus which, interestingly enough, Ralph Ellison has used to describe the American artist's relation to American reality. Added to this pair is Helen, "that faultless form," who figures as a contrast to Proteus whose gift for metamorphosis and multiple temporary forms makes him the epitome of fluidity. Menelaus loses Helen because he keeps asking why she loves him instead of being content to accept the mystery of love in a wordless embrace. That loss, brought on by a compulsion to understand and verbalize, is also a loss of substantial reality. From then on, Menelaus can never be sure what he has hold of, if indeed he has hold of anything. His struggles to hold Proteus extend to a more prolonged effort to catch hold of something in his narrative. Menelaus is telling a story which includes within it accounts of himself telling stories, and so on and so on. There are tales within tales, and the narrator can never be sure what he has hold of, just as Menelaus cannot be sure whether when he is trying to hold Proteus he is grappling with dreams. His lament, "When will I reach my goal

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through its cloaks of story? How many veils to naked Helen?" sounds like a projection of Barth's own despair at ever reaching and holding any authentic formed reality through the multiplying layers of fiction in which he feels entangled — the Hellenic quest is impeded at every turn by the Protean encounter. Even when he does regain his Helen he cannot be sure it is the real Helen or a dream substitute made of cloud. "For all I knew, I roared, what I now gripped was but a further fiction, maybe Proteus himself." The crippling and inhibiting worry that even Helen may be Proteus is a precise analogue of the suspicion that even Reality is a Fiction. At one point Menelaus says, "Menelaus! Proteus! Helen! For all we know, we're but stranded figures in Penelope's web, wove up in light to be unwove in darkness." Again the triangle, again the ever underlying suspicion that all apparent facts may be part of some larger fiction. Penelope's "embroidrous art," Menelaus' "raveled fabrication," Barth's own "cloaks of story" — where does it or can it stop? One hope expressed by the story is that one thing will survive all the changing receding fictions of existence — "the absurd, unending possibility of love." But the story itself is a story of loss, a demonstration of how we lose what we don't believe in, how we can never again be sure of the Helen we called into question. Floundering in fictions, we may never regain a firm hold on reality. This I think is the dread of deprivation which is detectable in these recent pieces by Barth.

It is evident in the last story, "Anonymiad." This is the first-person account of a minstrel who was not taken to Troy but left behind in the court of Clytemnestra and subsequently marooned on an island. There he dreams dreams with multiple possible endings, he invents private Mycenae for the real city he has been excluded from, and he invents a new mode of writing — "what I came to call fiction." Although excluded from the Trojan war and all knowledge of it, he amuses himself by imagining various versions of its progress and different possible denouements. Lacking an audience he commits his compositions to the sea in bottles. After running through various genres he finds he has "begun to run out of material" and in a new pessimism he imagines his "*opera* sinking undiscovered" — a neat pun looking back to Barth's own *Floating Opera*. He finds that "as my craft improved, my interest waned, and my earlier zeal seemed hollow as the jugs it filled. Was there any new thing to say, new way to say the old?" He outlines his idea for his next work which would synthesize all genres, merging everything from "grub fact" to "pure senseless music." But of course he does not write it, he only writes about planning to write it. His time is spent in "con-

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sidering and rejecting forms" (and of course the plurality of available forms and styles can have a paralyzing as well as a liberating effect). He concludes "It was my wish to elevate maroonment into a minstrel masterpiece; instead, I see now, I've spent my last resources contrariwise, reducing the masterpiece to a chronicle of minstrel misery." He then launches the last of his "opera," but foresees the time when it will perish, "with all things deciphered and undeciphered: men and women, stars and sky."

Perhaps in this account of seemingly futile writing in an endless solitude Barth has constructed an analogue for his own situation as he experiences it. But whereas before he distracted himself with stories, he now seems to be tormenting himself with accounts of stories that failed, that cannot be written, that can never be started. The first piece is called "Frame Tale" and it invites the reader to make a circular strip out of a page, which will then read "Once upon a time there was a story that began once upon a time . . ." and so on ad infinitum. And inside that verbal circle which moves but does not progress Barth seems temporarily to have trapped himself. At one point in the "Anonymiad" he says, "I yearned to be relieved of myself. . . . I'd relapse into numbness, as if, having abandoned song for speech, I meant now to give up language altogether and float voiceless in the wash of time like an amphora in the sea, my vision bottled." To abandon the difficulties of language is to leave behind the problems of self: Barth is here giving utterance to a recurring temptation or desire, detectable in much American writing, to give up all forms and definitions and abandon the contours of self and style to dissolution and silence. But this ultimate solution to the torments of identity and narration — torments amply, indeed profoundly, demonstrated in this volume, hovering and limping obsessively around the arbitrariness of all names and naming, all fictions and their telling — is irreversible, a final capitulation to some unselving flow which, along with the dread of getting trapped in fixed patterns, is a nightmare which haunts many contemporary American writers. To float voiceless in the wash of time is effectively to die, and even the self-paralyzing voice in Barth's latest book resists that particular quietus and quietness — "I'll mutter to the end."

Tony Tanner

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THE BIRTH OF A NATION

TOWARDS A NEW PAST: DISSENTING ESSAYS IN AMERICAN HISTORY. By Barton J. Bernstein. Pantheon Books. $6.95.

THE LIBERAL IDEAL IN THE CORPORATE STATE, 1900-1918. By James Weinstein. Beacon Press. $2.95.

In the broadest sense, the "New Left" historians are a generation in revolt against the thirties. Despite their internal disputes they all reject what they construe to be the liberal interpretation of the American twentieth century. They contest the views of a group of important historians who have devoted themselves to glorifying the history of the New Deal, its predecessors and its latter-day defenders. Quite naturally they reject the diluted radicalism of the post-Comintern period, which in its few contributions to historical writing has done little to disturb a complacent view of the American past. No less angrily, they have chipped away at the happy celebrations of American social development which describe an age of pastoral liberties transforming itself into an era of industrial democracy. On the contrary, they conclude that American leaders have often been tragically caught between economic goals and humanitarian ideals — or worse, that they have employed liberal democracy to mask an exploitative economic and political system. In sum, as a self-conscious generation of historians they have turned their revulsion not so much against the system they have discovered, but against those who have written defensive histories of it.

The most suggestive aspect thus far of New Left history has been its call for a new intellectual history, by which is meant a new conception of American ideology. The present dominance of liberal capitalism in America supported by business and labor leaders, and by most intellectuals, is an immensely important key to the past. In one way or another, Eugene Genovese, Staughton Lynd, William Appleman Williams and others have all suggested that it is imperative to understand the distinctive American liberalism which emerged from the conflicting social movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is an immensely difficult task. The isolation of an American ideology has not been a very successful enterprise, even for those historians who have identified it with philosophic Pragmatism or have defended it as an *a posteriori* truth. It is still more difficult to see this ideology among its contemporary alternatives, challenged, for example, by a non-capitalist

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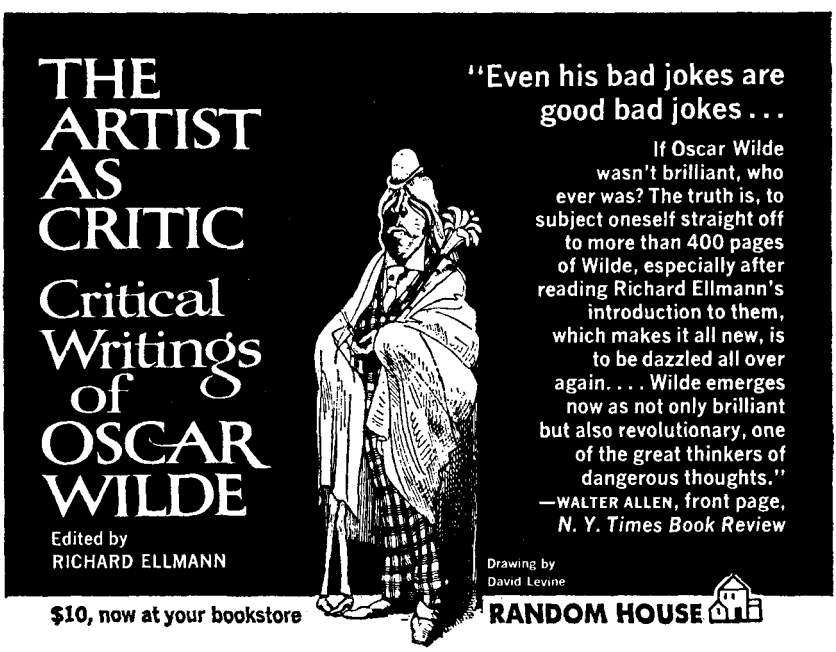
Southern planter aristocracy in the eighteen-fifties and by a strong Socialist movement before 1920. It has never been fashionable to take the arguments of the losing side very seriously in writing American history, and the Left is often no exception. Little has been done to describe the mechanisms by which a liberal and flexible American ideology has disarmed dissent. As Eugene Genovese writes, "Marxists have only begun to study the hegemonic mechanisms of bourgeois society."

One important attempt in this direction is James Weinstein's *Liberal Ideal in the Corporate State.* Together with Gabriel Kolko's and Robert Wiebe's work on Progressive legislation and the rise of a bureaucratic mentality among intellectuals, this book is enormously suggestive about the development of American liberalism. Weinstein's book is a fascinating study of the National Civic Federation, which is seen as a kind of pre-World War I breeding ground for the basic ideas of the liberal, corporate capitalism which dominates American society today. Under the guidance of reformer Ralph Easley and corporation leaders, the Federation helped to develop and promote important labor legislation and Federal economic regulation. The implications of these activities, Weinstein concludes, were un-democratic and anti-Socialist. Easley and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many of his associates were obsessed by the threat of class struggle and developed a system of informal government which excluded radicalism but made a place for conservative labor leaders. The result of these efforts was to help create a political system which opened its doors to those who accepted the dominance of the corporation in American life (which welcomed, even, those who wished to make the corporation into a socially responsible institution) and which slammed the door shut in the face of profound social change.

Because of their antagonism to other historians and their works, New Left writers have been described as revolutionists, attempting to displace a few powerful possessors of the written past. But the meaning of New Left history is a good deal more complex than this formulation suggests, and certainly, the historical profession is not monolithic. Barton Bernstein's edition of writings, *Towards a New Past,* reveals just how much New Left history is at the center of the discipline. The contributers to this volume come from Harvard, Wisconsin and Columbia, with one each from Yale and Johns Hopkins — a list of most of the principal graduate schools in American History. This is no provincial attack upon the dominant training centers. Quite unmistakably, New Left history is in many ways in the tradition of challenge to prevailing historical ideas. In one sense at least, it is part of the developing and always shifting reinterpretation of the past. For such reasons, it has all of the traits of other historical works: brilliance and mediocrity; conservative and radical methodology. And while New Left historians have been impatient with older historians, yet sometimes they repeat old fallacies and antiquated methods.

Placed side by side, the contributions to this volume by Jesse Lemisch, Eugene Genovese, Staughton Lynd and Christopher Lasch hardly appear similar. But they have one common trait, which at least superficially unites the whole Bernstein collection: a reaction against the liberalism of the fifties, and against the once-prevalent radical view of the New Deal as a precious system created in the Golden Age of American history. They share a preoccupation with the kinds of problems raised by the current student left (although these professors raised them before the present generation of students were "politicized").

The preponderance of articles (three) in this collection dealing with twentieth-century American foreign policy is no accident. New Left history began with an assault on the assumptions of the Cold War and a search for the origins of American dominance in the world. In effect, such attacks have paralleled the reevaluation of American foreign policy undertaken by George Kennan in his *American Diplomacy,* published in

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1952. But Kennan's "new realism" and his disdain for moralism in foreign policy obscured other fundamental points about America's world activities. The articles by Lloyd Gardner and Robert Smith on American foreign policy between 1900 and 1942 are both expressions of the best sort of work being done to unravel the tangled way in which American policy-makers attempted to secure an economic world order in which they might operate freely. A third article, by Marilyn Young, attempts without much success to balance economic factors with ideas of national interest and jingoism.

Looking at American society from a completely different perspective — from its submerged and inaudible elements — has also been one of the major approaches of the new historians. Here too, the results have differed in quality. Jesse Lemisch's "American Revolution from the Bottom Up" is one of several articles he has written arguing for a history of the inarticulate. But while this search has been rewarding, sometimes the claims for its importance are exaggerated. Elsewhere Lemisch has made an excellent case for the importance of merchant seamen as a radical force in the American Revolution. Here, however, his interpretation is broadened until it musters some very specialized evidence to interpret the whole Revolutionary War. The key to his thinking is the following: "And in our history we can no longer allow the powerful to speak for the powerless." True, but Lemisch seems to be attacking historians for writing about those men who have dominated, manipulated popular sentiment, and who have ruled America. It is no praise of the powerful to show how they turned the American Revolution into a movement to create a nation based upon foreign trade in the North and slavery in the South.

Sometimes more is learned about the inarticulate, not by writing their intellectual history, but by using sociological methodology to examine questions such as the nature of social mobility and internal migrations. Stephen Thernstrom's excellent article, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility," tells a good deal about the effects of urbanization in the nineteenth century. He suggests that migration from American farms to the cities was an experience comparable in many ways to immigration from Europe. There may have been significant upward social mobility in the middle of the nineteenth century, he concludes, but there was also an important element of the population which did not rise and which has largely been invisible until now.

The same search for a radical tradition and a politically usable past has led some historians backward into an old and debilitating argument about American history. The dispute over the basic outlines

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of the national past — Was it marked by constant struggle between opposing ideas or was it characterized by agreement or consensus? — has never been very fruitful. Neither position, struggle or consensus, is inherently radical or conservative, since two sorts of questions are involved: the truth of the matter and the political uses of each interpretation. Staughton Lynd's article, "Beyond Beard," and Barton Bernstein's introductory essay to the volume overlook this point. Bernstein places New Left historiography in the tradition of Beard and Frederick Jackson Turner. But these historians owe only a small debt to Beard. Bernstein misses an important sign in his collection. The least valuable articles do indeed emerge from a Beardian analysis, but the best shrewdly use the insights of the "consensus" historians. Staughton Lynd's "Beyond Beard" is an explicit attempt to revive Beard. But one has the impression that Lynd's attempts to trim the loose ends of Beard's theories have cut the whole fabric of analysis. There is no need to revise Beard. On the contrary — he should be rescued from historians like Lynd who have sought to transform his sense of political and economic struggle in American history into a moral contest.

The Bernstein collection reveals the very complex and contradictory origins and insights of New Left historiography. Very properly, it can be considered an attempt to answer the needs of today's social critics. But also, the work represented here is at the very center of American historiography, reflecting and absorbing the traditions of writing American history. In some cases, New Left history has been constructed out of new methodologies or put together from fresh evidence which was uncovered because historians asked different sorts of questions about the past. At other times the techniques are conservative. But with all of its ambiguities and exaggerations it ranks among the most exciting work being done today in historical research.

James Burkhart Gilbert

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NOTE: *Stephen Hero* by James Joyce and *Labyrinths* by Jorge Luis Borges are now back in stock, clothbound. $5.50 (each).

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MIXED BAG

AFTER EXPERIENCE. By W. D. Snodgrass. Harper & Row. $4.50.

FIRSTBORN. By Louise Gluck. New American Library. $4.00.

THE BACK COUNTRY. By Gary Snyder. New Directions. $4.00.

THE RIBS OF DEATH. By Paul Zimmer. October House. $4.95.

The title of W. D. Snodgrass' new volume, his first in eight years, would seem to point to a cooling of those intensely personal concerns he developed with such great care and skill in the earlier *Heart's Needle*. In fact, and here one does not know whether or not to include "alas," the concerns remain, as urgent as ever; the voice persists, no less whimsical and pathetic than it was; the landscape has not improved. The poems in *After Experience* are different, though, more depressing, if that seems possible. The poet's experience has structured perception in such a way that what once in the poems seemed peculiar to Snodgrass, if nonetheless mundane and familiar, no longer seems merely a personal problem at all. Snodgrass' more recent poems reverberate with irony and dismay at the downward drift of an entire culture, and we attend as much to patterns of hopelessness and betrayal as we once did to the particularities of obstructed intimacy.

Of course, it is not the context in which Snodgrass thinks and feels that concerns us very much, but the degree to which he can artfully embody his concerns in language that makes them somehow meaningful for us. Largely he has succeeded, in spite of the grave risks he has incurred in the preparation of his new volume. A great many of the poems he has collected here are dangerously close to being set pieces, rather stagy, and so judiciously molded that they seem almost too nice, too clean and transparent and predictable to be true. A poem like "Leaving The Motel" is perfect in its way, perhaps on first acquaintance even a little too perfect, inevitable in the particulars of its unfolding, the rhymes so evenly modulated as in these times to call attention to themselves.

Outside, the last kids holler
Near the pool: they'll stay the night.
Pick up the towels; fold your collar
Out of sight.

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Check: is the second bed
Unrumpled, as agreed?
Landlords have to think ahead
In case of need,

Too. Keep things straight: don't take
The matches, the wrong keyrings —
We've nowhere we could keep a keepsake —
Ashtrays, combs, things

That sooner or later others
Would accidentally find.
Check; take nothing of one another's
And leave behind

Your license number only,
Which they won't care to trace;
We've paid. Still, should such things get lonely,
Leave in their vase

An aspirin to preserve
Our lilacs, the wayside flowers
We've gathered and must leave to serve
A few more hours;

That's all. We can't tell when
We'll come back, can't press claims;
We would no doubt have other rooms then,
Or other names.

Why, then, does the poem work as well as it obviously does? Perhaps because the poet has been so very relentless in the cataloguing of those *things* that in essence constitute the reality of his experience, an experience so fragile, so impermanent as to have left no other marks on the poet's psyche. Precisely what is enforced in Snodgrass' poem is the anonymity of experience in the modern world, a radical skepticism about the communicability of emotions within contexts that are socially conditioned or imposed. No sense of persons, of personalities emerges from the poem. Even the authority that lurks somewhere beyond the scene is faceless, perhaps more a product of the imagination than anything substantial. The specter of the haunted self locked within itself, yet in fitful combat with the world, is wonderfully suggested by the poet's use of words like "others" and "they." Who these others are we cannot be expected to say, nor would the poet be likely to identify them with precision. And yet, mysteriously, all of us know, beyond saying, for we trust Snodgrass as a guide in these matters.

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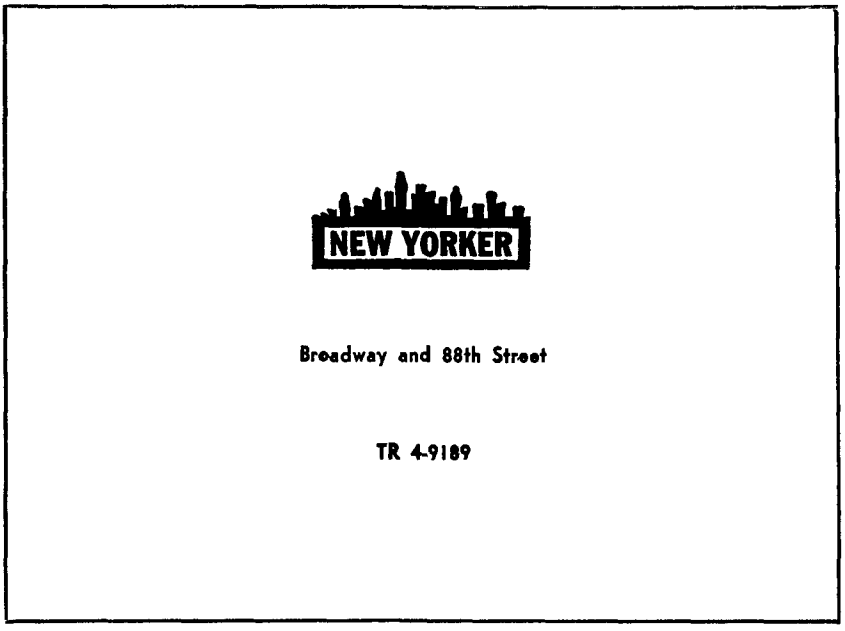
There have been a number of complaints already that Snodgrass' "despairing voice is half-heartedly one-toned," as one reviewer put it. I should speak instead of control, the poet's unyielding stranglehold on the ordering of events in his poems, events which otherwise might threaten to tear to shreds the fabric of the poet's sanity. I don't know that singleness of tone need be a liability, at least not insofar as the poet is the maker of individual poems, complete unto themselves, rather than the maker of a whole range of poems that together constitute his opus. It is certainly too early to speak of Snodgrass as a major figure in the poetry of our time, precisely because he has not written enough for us to make such judgments, and because there is relatively little variety in his approach to his craft. What we can say is that he has written a number of exquisite poems that seem destined to be remembered as part of the finest lyric poetry of our time. Certainly he has succeeded the late Randall Jarrell as our most heart-breaking poet, this being a title originally ascribed to Jarrell by his friend Robert Lowell. In fact, Snodgrass' poetry has consistently evoked from readers a degree of pity and sympathy that has made it all but impossible to consider the poems with any kind of detachment. The voice has been so honest, so very



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familiar in its way that we have experienced it almost as a revelation of our own imminent possibilities.

It would be foolish, of course, to recommend Snodgrass' new volume unequivocally. In a number of poems, the versification works against the emotional content, as in "The Platform Man," where the imperatives of a particular form impose the poet's resort to crude devices. In other cases, as in the pathetic "A Friend," the connections between domestic despair and cultural wasteland are hinted at, but never really demonstrated. In such a poem we have the wish for a connection, but no real linkage. A visit to the ex-wife to see the children is saturated in disgust over the banal evocations of "adultery and loss" reflected on the TV screen, in front of which the family sprawls together. The poem concludes: "As always, you stand shining near / Your window. I stand, Prince of Lies / Who's seen bliss; now I can drive back / Home past wreck and car lot, past shack / Slum and steelmill reddening the skies, / Past drive-ins, the hot pits where our teens / Fingerfuck and that huge screen's / Images fill their vacant eyes." The poet's attempt here to relate levels of experience lacks coherence. One is tempted to attribute personal problems to the influence of the cultural milieu, but one is not certain this can always be securely managed. Is marital discord and misery of separation from one's children somehow concomitant with or derivative from teenage fingerfucking and the banal manifestations of popular culture? Is a poet of Snodgrass' sophistication, wit and skill a product of drive-in movies and "stale joke-books"? Must the inevitable institutions and cultural detritus of our time overwhelm poets as they do others? Of such things it is difficult to speak confidently, but we must require of the poet like Snodgrass that he address himself to them in terms of their necessity rather than as random elements in a playing off of observations.

Such problems are considerably more pronounced in the verse of a young poet who has published her first volume. Louise Gluck is an extraordinarily meticulous craftsman whose poems give promise of a really remarkable career. Working with materials associated with the confessional tradition, but speaking in a variety of voices, she has created a body of work that is painful and shocking, but without sufficient coherence to justify the relentless evocations of violence that reverberate in so many of her pages. In a poem like "Thanksgiving," images of corruption and decay are marshaled, but we do not know why they must have anything to do with the people in the poem. As in some of Snodgrass' work, all we can really explain is the poet's desire that her images and observations fit together. Here is the poem:

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In every room, encircled by a name-
less Southern boy from Yale,
There was my younger sister singing a Fellini theme
And making phone calls
While the rest of us kept moving her discarded boots
Or sat and drank. Outside, in twenty–
nine degrees, a stray cat
Grazed in our driveway,
Seeking waste. It scratched the pail.
There were no other sounds.
Yet on and on the preparation of that vast consoling meal
Edged toward the stove. My mother
Had the skewers in her hands.
I watched her tucking skin
As though she missed her young, while bits of onion
Misted snow over the pronged death.

The echoes abound in this poetry. But echoes in the work of a young poet need not always be wholly assimilated if the poet is to achieve a voice of his own. A poem like "Grandmother In The Garden" is no less lovely and moving for the fact that it calls to mind a number of Jarrell's better poems, including one like "Next Day" from his final volume. Here is Miss Gluck's poem:

The grass below the willow
Of my daughter's wash is curled
With earthworms, and the world
Is measured into row on row
Of unspiced houses, painted to seem real.
The drugged Long Island summer sun drains
Pattern from those empty sleeves, beyond my grandson
Squealing in his pen. I have survived my life.
The yellow daylight lines the oak leaf
And the wire vines melt with the unchanged changes
Of the baby. My children have their husbands' hands.
My husband's framed, propped bald as a baby on their pianos,
My tremendous man. I close my eyes. And all the clothes
I have thrown out come back to me, the hollows
Of my daughter's slips . . . they drift; I see the sheer
Summer cottons drift, equivalent to air.

The poise and serenity of this poem constitute a remarkable tribute to a poet so young, and the dense aural patterns are woven so casually that one cannot but wonder at this poet's mastery of her craft.

Miss Gluck is a poet of few themes, but these she develops with a ferocity that borders on obsession. She appears to write best when she is least herself, when she writes out of contexts which are relatively

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unfamiliar to her own experience, and which she need not invest with the accounterments of melodrama or terror in order to make them striking. The poems are often extremely lean, several cultivating a stenographic bluntness which owes more to Alan Dugan than to any of the woman poets I can think of. In fact, the more one thinks about the resemblance, the more one can identify Dugan as a presence behind these poems, especially in the many combinations of slang words and elaborate Latinisms, as in "Saturnalia": "Now northward some two-bit / vercingetorix sharpens his will. A star / Is born. Caesar snores on his perch above the Senate."

What informs Dugan's verse, though, is a moral passion, an earnestness which is largely lacking in Miss Gluck's volume. Instead of moral passion we too often get melodrama, the forcing of images to yield more than they can or ought to yield. Situations are unambiguously awful; mothers become prototypical predators, husbands monomaniacal in their obsessions, lovers indistinguishable from pimps. Details accumulate inexorably, as if by an energy of their own, an energy in no way responsible to the shaping intelligence that presumably controls the poem. A pregnant woman, miserable about the imminent birth of her child, surveys her room as follows (in the poem "The Wound"): "The air stiffens to a crust. / From bed I watch / Clots of flies, crickets / Frisk and titter. Now / The weather is such grease. / All day I smell the roasts / Like presences." The evocations are so patently horrible that one is inclined to dismiss them as the meanderings of a morbidly diseased psyche, and it is virtually inconceivable that any serious reader will sympathize with such a vision, for we are given no opportunity to understand why the speaker should see her world from the perspective that is developed in the poem. In a sense it is possible to say that neurosis is here exploited for itself, because its manifestations are bizarre and exotic. Miss Gluck would do well to cultivate the unusual capacity for compassion she demonstrates in her successful poems, among them "Returning a Lost Child," "The Game" and "Letter From Our Man in Blossomtime." On the basis of these we can safely predict a distinguished career. For those who have lamented the laxness and mediocrity of most recent work by younger practitioners, *Firstborn* ought to constitute a most encouraging sign.

The poetry of Gary Snyder is monotonous, flat and superficial, and probably for those reasons is much esteemed by a variety of people, most of them very young. He is even admired by a few intelligent critics like Professor Thomas Parkinson of Berkeley, about whose taste I can only wonder after reading his recent essay on Snyder in *The*

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Southern Review. In its particulars the essay is fine, drawing attention to Snyder's many failings as an artist, even acknowledging that Snyder apparently cares less than he should for the art of poetry. Only what Professor Parkinson says about some, or many, of Snyder's poems can be said of any of them, virtually without exception, and Professor Parkinson seems to know this is so. Otherwise, why not provide, in the course of a lengthy article, some one or two samples of the poet's achieved work? The most Professor Parkinson is willing to give us are brief fragments of poems that do not wholly succeed, for a variety of reasons including glibness, the reduction of persons and experiences to the status of objects and unnecessary clogging of lines in the interests of compression. How then, seeing what he does obviously see, can Professor Parkinson say of one of Snyder's earlier volumes, "It has received no prizes, but over the years it may well become, for those men who care, a sacred text"?

I do not doubt that a number of Snyder's texts are treasured as sacred books, but precisely by those who do *not* care, at least about poetry as an art form. Snyder's most recent, and best publicized volume tells us all we need to know about his poetry, and the concerns of his disciples. *The Back Country* is a collection of generally brief lyrics covering Snyder's characteristic themes, and written over a period of roughly fifteen years. Reflected in these poems are Snyder's love of the West Coast, especially the rugged mountain country where, presumably, a man can be a man and smoke Marlboro and learn all about woodlore: "Woke once in the night, pissed, / checkt the coming winter's stars / built up the fire / still glowing in the chilling dawn." More important, though, is Snyder's long familiarity with the Orient, and his consequent love of all things orientally exotic, including Japanese place–names, family names and the names of dishes most Americans will not recognize. Predictably, Snyder's things and places are for him simply guideposts in what the poet obviously considers a vast spiritual journey, one that is to permit him to engage and transcend the realities of civilization and evoke the superiority of wilderness and humble orient. The trouble is that Snyder never really shows us why the one ought to be recommended over the other — the contexts in which sensations and impressions are evoked are patently unreal and unelaborated, in the nature of still-life water colors or "washes." All one can think of when thinking back on a Snyder poem is a blur of pine trees, lazy grasses and faint sounds of bells and chants and bird cries emanating from temples and the reaches of the night. The infrequent intrusions of reality have all the complexity of this brief exchange: "-how long you say you been Japan? / six years eh you must like the place. / those guys in New York /

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bunch of fuckin crooks. / They ain't just selling / little two-bit caps, they making books."

One feels a little like an unwholesome sonofabitch to cast aspersions on a fellow who is apt to make such "vital" connections, and yet I cannot help being put off by unexamined attitudes that do not arise from the usual contexts of a man's thoughts. No wonder so many young people find in Snyder a prophetic voice, though I confess I have not met the kids Professor Parkinson is certain exist. Snyder permits people to congratulate themselves on making the right connections, on having the appropriately pious or outraged response to brutality, while at the same time encouraging withdrawal to the woods and an amused absorption in the exotic aspects of surface life. Snyder's commitments, while very likely sincere, are grossly superficial, and his evocations of them at best programmistic and facile. His poetry can be appealing only to those who know what to expect and are prepared to read the poetry in such a way that it will support those vague and formless projects that are their lives.

Though Paul Zimmer is still a very young man, it is only with difficulty that we can speak of him as one of our younger poets. His is

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not a poetry of promise, but of real fulfillment, and it is unlikely that readers will know which older poets lie behind these extraordinary poems. Zimmer's is an unusual talent, in that it is remarkably original while working with forms that are conventional almost to the point of inflexibility. The poems are short lyrics, and they have to do with varieties of endurance, with life as it is beset by intimations of death, and as it struggles to appropriate experience to the requisites of soul. It is a book that beats with an almost subliminal and yet somehow irrepressible gaiety, despite the severity of syntax and the deadly precision of the language. And it has nothing in it of the literary exercise, though the relish in words and in the sounds of words for their own sake is obvious. Always what one notices in these poems is the operation of control, so that the persistent parody of characters and of perspectives never suggests the essential frivolity of light verse. All is weighed for value and proportion, and the results are precious, hard, almost gemlike in clarity. Meanings are never told, nor even hinted at, but somehow understood, a matter of the poet's ability to abide with us in the objects of his fancy, to maintain a perspective that is at once without and within.

Each poem in Zimmer's volume has sufficient quality to recommend it to readers, and so one is hard put to single out any for special attention. I especially like the poems collected at the end of the volume as *The Ribs of Death*. Here the poet's eloquence is somewhat riper than in the earlier poems, and the vision more unabashedly somber. Still none of them, I suppose, is quite as fine as "First Mate Joseph Conrad":

My legs are worn to dangling ropes
By this ball bearing sea which rolls
The world against the frictional sky.
Even these waves which mime
The quarters of the moon are not enough
To hook it to a stop.
All is curves and angles.
Even our unwrenchable wake would lead us
To believe our course was like the flicking
Of the sharks and salmons—the creatures
Of this watery, violent world, who know
The tints and foul moods of the sea.

But more than this sea is mutable.
I have stood upon the bridge and watched
The subtle, cloudless sky grow dark

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And crack like rarest china, and until
The storm had snuffed my smoking pipe
I did not realize the change.

There are no straight lines in the sky,
Or in the sea, or in these seamen.
All is by degrees, so changeable
The senses are like earthworms
Nosed against a boulder.

I have been too long upon the water.
Death and danger ring like children's threats.
Is it presumptuous to think I can do more?
Perhaps some day I'll catch the corner
Of the sky and sea before it moves
Beyond my reach.

I wonder, is such poetry forever to be slighted as insufficiently natural, as evincing a formality that renders it irrelevant or out of touch? Or is it to be patronized simply as lovely, lofty, careful, a poetry to be enjoyed but not to be taken seriously? There is grave danger that a generation of readers is to become inexorably attached to the puerile simplicities of a Snyder, and that it will find no trouble in dismissing a really important body of work as "academic" or "traditional," neither of which epithets does justice to Zimmer's volume. But I suppose there are graver dangers than these to worry about, and I have the feeling Mr. Zimmer will survive the inattention if it is to be. His is a passionate resignation, angry and calm at once, as in these concluding lines from "The Man In The First Wave":

But from some pulsing socket in the hills,
And twisting through the ragged palms will come
A bullet for the draining of my veins.

What use! My father ran upon a bowstring
And fell before the squinting of an eye,
And he gave the earth no mineral
It did not have before he died.

Robert Boyers

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TO A GRECIAN URN

THE LETTERS OF JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS: VOL. I. Ed. Herbert M. Schueller. Wayne State University Press. $17.50. VOL. II. Ed. Robert L. Peters. Wayne State University Press. $17.50.

John Addington Symonds did not like the word homosexual. He preferred Carl Heinrich Ulrich's (a German legal official) coinage, "Urning." The word derives from Plato's Uranos in the *Symposium* and Symonds delighted in its poetic associations: it was not acid and severe but sweet and magical. It suggested enchanted groves. Tolkienian wonderlands. While composing his life of Michelangelo, Symonds wrote to Edmund Gosse, "if he had any sexual energy at all he was a Urning."

This fetish characterizes the whole man and his style. Symonds' self-deception — his intense yearning to lose himself in myriads of words — is in fact the marvelous thing about his letters, which have just been superbly edited by Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters for the Wayne State University Press. Several aspects of his life have been clarified previously by his biographers: his erotic infatuations in the name of Platonic *amor*; his peregrinations from Harrow and Oxford to Davos and Venice in search of health as well as in pursuit of Swiss peasants and Venetian gondoliers; his connections with literary lights of the age: Gosse, Jowett, Dakyns and the Cloughs; Swinburne, Pater, Sidgwick; Horatio Brown, T. H. Green, Havelock Ellis and R. L. Stevenson. But the quality and variety of his Leopardian poses, his filtrations with deception, have remained as muddled as was the man.

He was, of course, tragic from the start. Sickly in body and mind; the victim of unending breakdowns; perpetually persuaded that there was a more colossal demon in himself than there actually was. "I am not what I look, tear off the clothes and flesh and find the death and hell inside." He sensed that his poetry was execrable, his prose fustian ("Word-painting" was his term), and his history constructed upon a shaky edifice.

Still he persisted in the vain belief, almost a myth, that rampant scribosis could somehow distract him from *l'amour de l'impossible*.

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There was nothing logical or scientific about his sensibility. It never occurred to him, for example, that if his love was impossible he was therefore chaste, a puritan. He was a dreamer, forever wandering in Mediterranean byways. He would have found solace in Sartre's last will and testament: "I, twenty-five volumes, eighteen thousand pages of text, three hundred engravings, including a portrait of the author, I sit in state through a hundred thirty pounds of paper."

Not ironically, there was a genuine warmth and sense of life beneath the facade, as is evident in Symonds' early letters. A fierce honesty about his own fragmentation. "I am afraid of forming a permanent double consciousness in my own mind," he wrote Dakyns (another disenchanted soul) at 28, "of being related to this world of phantoms, and moving meanwhile in the world of fact."

His double consciousness composed of outer pretense and inner secret took hold of him nevertheless. He courted and married Catherine North, who permitted with dignity his close friendships and who bore him four daughters. Their marriage was forever a black disillusionment, Symonds unable to consummate it on his wedding night. On the alleged grounds of helping an impoverished Swiss family, he poured money into their married son Christian Buol, with whom he lived in sin and sodomy. All the time explaining his comradeship to Catherine and his friends as part of his education as a citizen of the world. "You do not feel the beauty of a nation till you have slept with one of its natives."

"Soddington," as Swinburne called him, was in some ways the archetypal victim of the general malaise of his age. He was thoroughly skeptical about religion and death. But his problems extended deeper. Unrelenting fascination for his own sexual nature affected every area of his life. His tastes varied, from choirboys and sixth-formers to British grenadiers and Alpine farmers. Inwardly he knew of his doom and sympathized with it; outwardly he was fettered. He could do nothing. He was one of the "other" Victorians. At best he would become vindictive towards female "Urnings" like "Vernon Lee." The contradictions of his life were never to be resolved and this he knew as clearly as he knew that the Pope would not be excommunicated. In defeat, he poured his energies into the writing of heavy tomes, aware that even this deflection would prove abortive.

A curious side of his soul went into his letters, primarily to his loving, if somewhat sugary, sister Charlotte. This is a side not seen in his literary works. He wrote her religiously every Sunday, offering her few of the self-confessions he found in Cellini's autobiography, which

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he translated. Here his dreams are muted, his desires quelled. But even here fantastic antinomies abound. "It is quite a mistake," he warned Charlotte, "to suppose that one ever needs subject matter in writing a letter: I think those are most interesting which detail least of daily affairs." Then he perversely turned and exclaimed, "My letters are Bulletins of Oxford gossip."

Yet his letters are no biographical morsels. They are important for the view they provide of upper–middle-class Victorian life. The reader discovers the other sides of the wealthy, if somewhat corrupt, Harrow and the fashionable Balliol. He follows Symonds, day by day, in his classical readings and in tutorials with "the Greats": the radical Jowett, the learned Conington, the impressive T. H. Green. He listens to his hair-raising descriptions of the "fag system." Often Symonds is sentimental: "I have just been gathering periwinkles in Magdalen walks: they grow there in immense quantities, both blue and white." But usually he is more informative and faithfully chronicles life at school and, later, life with Catherine.

Also significant in Symonds' letters, not all of which have been or

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can yet be published, are his many masks. His moods change within a moment from joy to melancholy, his true state unclear. The humorless and unaffected seriousness of his nature, however, shines throughout. Life was not literature for him. He craved so much more than literature. Nowhere does the reader see this more clearly than in the tender accounts of his strangulating father, despite any and all of Symonds' protests of filial love. Here is the young man as inveterate hero-worshipper, later to become a pious devotee of "Whitman-mania." In all his friendships, Symonds was the more enthusiastic partner. We view him slowly becoming convinced that fate is character and that certain immutable laws can never be changed. But he never learned that character is not cut in marble. And finally, the ultimate romantic irony: Symonds himself disclosing that self-deception had been the besetting sin of mankind.

His folly was that life turned out *not* to be literature. He lost the chance of becoming the Professor of Poetry at Oxford because of careless remarks about his private affairs and religious views. If he cast everything to the winds for one moment's passing ecstasy, he also forfeited art to nature. His biographies (Sidney, Jonson, Shelley) were condemned in his times and today are no longer read. *Essays Speculative and Suggestive,* a compilation of everything he thought he believed, enjoyed no better fortune. His lucubrations on the Greek poets are too personal and subjective, written in line with his ruling passion, to be perused by readers other than Victorian experts. *Vagabunduli Libellus,* a book of erotic poetry, he himself had grave doubts about and his friends told him to burn it. He printed privately *A Problem in Greek Ethics,* his *apologia pro vita sua,* his *Corydon.* But by then his religious perplexities had left him: unlike Gide, he knew that writing was for him a form of salvation and he was ready to turn himself over to Havelock Ellis — as a medical case history.

What was left? The ponderous seven volumes of his *Renaissance in Italy.* No one can deny his achievement here. Although he in no sense soared as did Gibbon, his history was the first full-scale study of the period in English. It was the only study of Renaissance civilization that could compare with Jacob Burckhardt's. It had its place and was recognized for the monument of merit it is. But even here, one feels the presence of the man behind the work of art. And that presence is not of a great man. A suffering and sublimely tragic creature, yes, but not a consummate historian or prodigious intellect. A passionately out-giving man who wrote to become uplifted (the term was his) and not to enlighten the world. In renaissance Italy he discovered the very same

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qualities he knew lay hidden in himself. "I do not know what is here," he wrote to his great friend A. O. Rutson from Sorrento, "but I feel in Italy a continual unsatisfied desire." This fascination had more to do with the exotic, the elusive and the taboo, than with Italy. It intimately concerned Symonds' sense of that which can never be. *Sunt lacrimae rerum. . . .*

And it is here also that he speaks out to us today, an age riven between a festering Freudianism and a revolutionary and sexual something — a colossal *je ne sais quoi* which is coming; a despairing time whose most reverenced literary artist, Jean Genet, may turn out to be also its most unblemished and, in Sartre's phrase, saintly homosexual. Susan Sontag notes that today "homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard — and the most articulate audience — of Camp." In the sense that "Camp" is the codified, formal aesthetic discourse of the homosexual, so, too, is Symonds' ineluctable dilemma a microcosm of the plight of much modern culture and contemporary art. The differences are of boundaries only. Our imagery has become less viscous; we do not cultivate a taste for artificial flowers (though we adore Beardsley); but underneath our surfaces and masks lurks the gargantuan "Urning" of the whole artistic environment, with something of the intensity of an apocalypse.

Our contemporary homosexual writers have failed as Symonds failed: emphatically and profoundly. In his orderly repression, he represents almost the archetypal paradigm of Freudian mythology; he "sublimed" his unconquerable memories in order to coexist with louder, bleating inner-demons. The converse could never have been true for him: writing tempered sexuality, not the other way round. It is in this progression from impossible sexuality to consolatory but imperfect art that he was most unwittingly prophetic: beckoning Valery Larbaud and Gide; anticipating Wilde (to whom he once sent a postcard) and C. P. Cavafy (in whom he would have found a kindred soul); heralding Albee and Genet. For all his broken bitterness, there was after all a certain strength and beauty: the gradual crystallization of his awareness that doom had been imminent from the outset. The sanctity of his solipsistic vision was that the soul realized how soulless it in fact was. Souls do never meet, could have been his utterance.

Symonds' tragedy transcends that of mere artlessness. "Each of us has some incalculable doom, and neither of us knows what the doom is," he wrote to a friend shortly before he died. Every homosexual artist is a dreamer who hallucinates in order to live; and he creates only so that he may die peacefully. Each transcendent moment of hallucina-

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tion represents a temporary paradise. He ecstatically discovers this temporary paradise only to lose it; his kingdom is an eternal exile forever to be wept over. Unlike the temporary calm of other men, the ardent flames of his hallucinating tendency can never be extinguished. There can be no quiescence of this reaching toward the great, the mighty and the powerful. As Virgil would have said, there are paradoxes of things that are nowhere more lucid than in the abject saintliness of the homosexual artist. For this reason, every homosexual artist, like Symonds, is at once greater and more perdurable than his art — or than it ever can be in his estimate. In his most opulent condition, hallucination conquers the most painful memories, and by so doing, it conquers his art as well. Nowhere else does nature tyrannize over art and enslave her to prosecute her will more than in the case of the enchained homosexual artist-victim. R. L. Stevenson, his tubercular friend, seems to have comprehended the paradoxes of Symonds' paradise-exile when he said at his death, "now the strange, pathetic brilliant creature is gone into the night."

The peculiar relation between Symonds the "Urning" and the homosexuality of his decadent age — like that of every artist and the particular malaise of his time — has yet to be explained. Two volumes of his letters have now appeared and his autobiography will be released for publication in 1976. Perhaps then we may learn what the stones of Venice were really like.

G. S. Rousseau

"The function of poetry is to discover

THE SECRET MEANING OF THINGS"

— FERLINGHETTI

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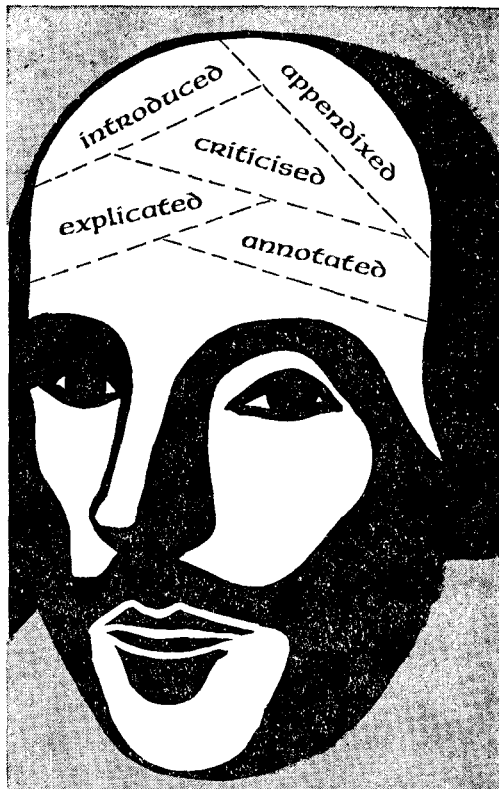

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LETTERS

Who Counts?

Sirs:

On p. 141 of the Winter issue, Irving Howe writes, "The 'essential destiny' of 'all the art of youth' is now a suffocating popularity, a rapid success on the market," and this leads him into "speculations about the end of modernism." Of what and whom is he speaking? Certainly not rock music, which is no more "art" than Frank Sinatra was to Howe's generation, or the "underground" press, which is no closer to literature than *Time*. If painters, he might have a case, only among figures of moderate success. If serious writers, there is practically no evidence at all of the kind of popularity Howe implies. Surely no critic under thirty-five—that's younger than Susan Sontag and Philip Roth—is as firmly established with upwardly mobile establishments as, to cite one handy example, Howe himself was at a similar age; no essayist is as highly touted as James Baldwin; no novelist as extravagantly praised or commercially successful as Truman Capote, Gore Vidal or Norman Mailer—to name four of Howe's own contemporaries. No, though the established old piously bemoan the supposed success of the young, if not erect suffocating barriers in their path, the truth is that there simply are no well-known, let alone affluent, writers more serious than journalists and publicists, whether conservative or modernist, less because of lack of literacy or talent among the young than the hindrances of their literary elders (see Richard Kostelanetz in *Salmagundi*'s fifth issue regarding Howe's own resistances to the contrary young) and, most important, the failure of young writers to create the magazines and publishing houses that, as cultural history tells us, every generation must found for its own, as well as literature's, survival.

Jean-Jacques Cory
Westport, Conn.

Mr. Howe replies:

Mr. Cory grants me painters. Why not rock music too? Partisans of "youth culture" declare rock music to be its dominant and most original mode of expression: its success in the contemporary culture is obvious. To compare it to Frank Sinatra is a *heartless* sign of generational bias such as one might expect from the "literary elders."

That these elders hinder young people from starting their own magazines is a preposterous claim. How could they? Young people now have more money than their equivalents of a few decades ago, and if they cared to start avant-garde literary magazines, no one could stop them. Indeed, in the past it's been precisely the resistance of elders to "the contrary young" that spurred them to set up their own journals. The differences seem to be that: a) the young don't seem nearly as interested in writing fiction and criticism as their counterparts of my generation did; b) major energies are instead going into music, the film and journalism (for evidence of "suffocating popularity" and "rapid success on the market" one need only turn to the lists of Random House and the pages of *Life*); c) the idea that there is profound conflict between a besieged avant-garde minority culture and a dominant middlebrow culture doesn't seem to strike most young people as interesting or "relevant." I stick by what I said.

But, who is Richard Kostelanetz?

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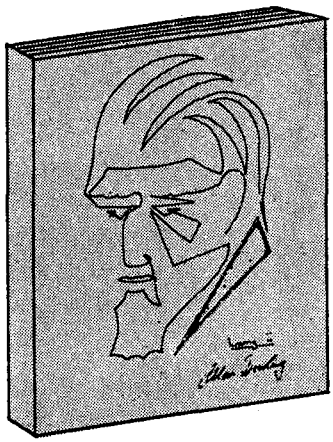

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